

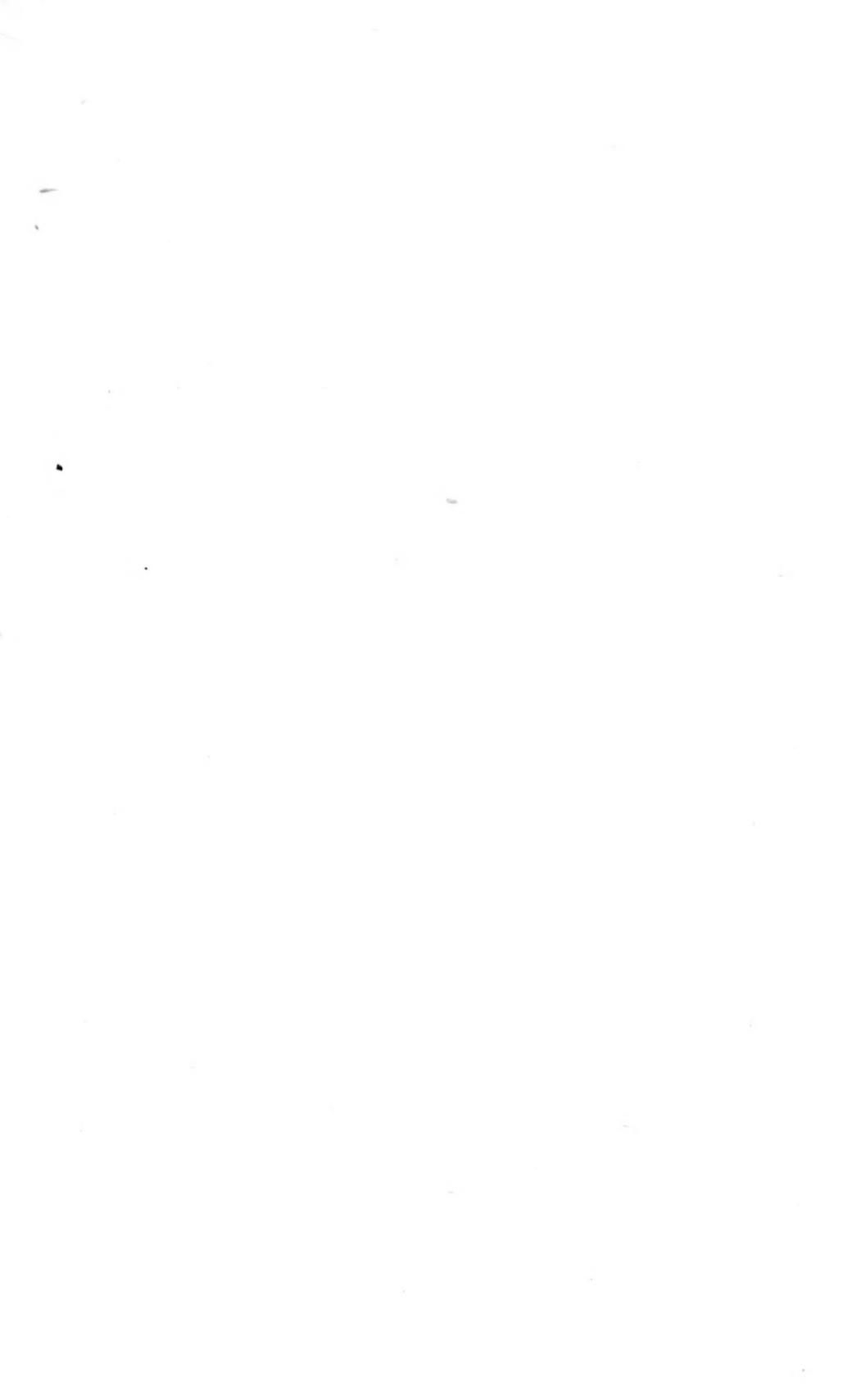
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S H I R L E Y .

A Tale.

BY

CURRER BELL,

AUTHOR OF "JANE EYRE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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C O N T E N T S.



CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
SHIRLEY AND CAROLINE	1

CHAPTER II.

FURTHER COMMUNICATIONS ON BUSINESS.	34
---	----

CHAPTER III.

SHIRLEY SEEKS TO BE SAVED BY WORKS	75
--	----

CHAPTER IV.

MR. DONNE'S EXODUS	97
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

WHITSUNTIDE	119
-----------------------	-----

CHAPTER VI.

	PAGE
THE SCHOOL-FEAST	137

CHAPTER VII.

WHICH THE GENTEEL READER IS RECOMMENDED TO SKIP, LOW PERSONS BEING HERE INTRO- DUCED	162
--	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

A SUMMER NIGHT	180
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX.

TO-MORROW	206
---------------------	-----

CHAPTER X.

MRS. PRYOR	228
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI.

TWO LIVES	258
---------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

AN EVENING OUT	275
--------------------------	-----

S H I R L E Y.



CHAPTER I.

SHIRLEY AND CAROLINE.

SHIRLEY showed she had been sincere in saying she should be glad of Caroline's society, by frequently seeking it: and, indeed, if she had not sought it, she would not have had it; for Miss Helstone was slow to make fresh acquaintance. She was always held back by the idea that people could not want her: that she could not amuse them; and a brilliant, happy, youthful creature, like the heiress of Field-head, seemed to her too completely independent of society so uninteresting as hers, ever to find it really welcome.

Shirley might be brilliant, and probably happy likewise, but no one is independent of genial society; and though in about a month she had made the acquaintance of most of the families round, and was on quite free and easy terms with all the Misses

Sykes, and all the Misses Pearson, and the two superlative Misses Wynne, of Walden Hall; yet, it appeared, she found none amongst them very genial: she fraternized with none of them, to use her own words. If she had had the bliss to be really Shirley Keeldar, Esq., Lord of the Manor of Briarfield, there was not a single fair one in this and the two neighbouring parishes, whom she should have felt disposed to request to become Mrs. Keeldar, lady of the manor. This declaration she made to Mrs. Pryor, who received it very quietly, as she did most of her pupil's off-hand speeches, responding,—

“My dear, do not allow that habit of alluding to yourself as a gentleman to be confirmed: it is a strange one. Those who do not know you, hearing you speak thus, would think you affected masculine manners.”

Shirley never laughed at her former governess: even the little formalities and harmless peculiarities of that lady were respectable in her eyes: had it been otherwise, she would have proved herself a weak character at once; for it is only the weak who make a butt of quiet worth; therefore she took her remonstrance in silence. She stood quietly near the window, looking at the grand cedar on her lawn, watching a bird on one of its lower boughs. Presently she began to chirrup to the bird: soon her chirrup grew clearer; ere long she was whistling; the whistle struck into a tune, and very sweetly and deftly it was executed.

“My dear!” expostulated Mrs. Pryor.

“Was I whistling?” said Shirley; “I forgot. I beg your pardon, ma’am. I had resolved to take care not to whistle before you.”

“But, Miss Keeldar, where did you learn to whistle? You must have got the habit since you came down into Yorkshire. I never knew you guilty of it before.”

“Oh! I learned to whistle a long while ago.”

“Who taught you?”

“No one: I took it up by listening, and I had laid it down again; but lately, yesterday evening, as I was coming up our lane, I heard a gentleman whistling that very tune in the field on the other side of the hedge, and that reminded me.”

“What gentleman was it?”

“We have only one gentleman in this region, ma’am, and that is Mr. Moore; at least he is the only gentleman who is not gray haired: my two venerable favourites, Mr. Helstone and Mr. Yorke, it is true, are fine old beaux; infinitely better than any of the stupid young ones.”

Mrs. Pryor was silent.

“You do not like Mr. Helstone, ma’am?”

“My dear, Mr. Helstone’s office secures him from criticism.”

“You generally contrive to leave the room when he is announced.”

“Do you walk out this morning, my dear?”

“Yes, I shall go to the Rectory, and seek and

find Caroline Helstone, and make her take some exercise: she shall have a breezy walk over Nunnelly Common."

"If you go in that direction, my dear, have the goodness to remind Miss Helstone to wrap up well, as there is a fresh wind, and she appears to me to require care."

"You shall be minutely obeyed, Mrs. Pryor: meantime, will you not accompany us yourself?"

"No, my love; I should be a restraint upon you: I am stout and cannot walk so quickly as you would wish to do."

Shirley easily persuaded Caroline to go with her; and when they were fairly out on the quiet road, traversing the extensive and solitary sweep of Nunnelly Common, she as easily drew her into conversation. The first feelings of diffidence overcome, Caroline soon felt glad to talk with Miss Keeldar. The very first interchange of slight observations sufficed to give each an idea of what the other was. Shirley said she liked the green sweep of the common turf, and, better still, the heath on its ridges, for the heath reminded her of moors: she had seen moors when she was travelling on the borders near Scotland. She remembered particularly a district traversed one long afternoon, on a sultry, but sunless day in summer: they journeyed from noon till sunset, over what seemed a boundless waste of deep heath, and nothing had they seen but wild sheep; nothing heard but the cries of wild birds.

“I know how the heath would look on such a day,” said Caroline; “purple-black: a deeper shade of the sky-tint, and that would be livid.”

“Yes — quite livid, with brassy edges to the clouds, and here and there a white gleam, more ghastly than the lurid tinge, which, as you looked at it, you momentarily expected would kindle into blinding lightning.”

“Did it thunder?”

“It muttered distant peals, but the storm did not break till evening, after we had reached our inn: that inn being an isolated house at the foot of a range of mountains.”

“Did you watch the clouds come down over the mountains?”

“I did: I stood at the window an hour watching them. The hills seemed rolled in a sullen mist, and when the rain fell in whitening sheets, suddenly they were blotted from the prospect: they were washed from the world.”

“I have seen such storms in hilly districts in Yorkshire; and at their riotous climax, while the sky was all cataract, the earth all flood, I have remembered the Deluge.”

“It is singularly reviving after such hurricanes to feel calm return, and from the opening clouds to receive a consolatory gleam, softly testifying that the sun is not quenched.”

“Miss Keeldar, just stand still now, and look down at Nunnely dale and wood.”

They both halted on the green brow of the Common: they looked down on the deep valley robed in May raiment; on varied meads, some pearly with daisies, and some golden with king-cups: to-day all this young verdure smiled clear in sunlight; transparent emerald and amber gleams played over it. On Nunnwood—the sole remnant of antique British forest in a region whose lowlands were once all sylvan chase, as its highlands were breast-deep heather—slept the shadow of a cloud; the distant hills were dappled, the horizon was shaded and tinted like mother-of-pearl; silvery blues, soft purples, evanescent greens and rose-shades, all melting into fleeces of white cloud, pure as azury snow, allured the eye as with a remote glimpse of heaven's foundations. The air blowing on the brow was fresh, and sweet, and bracing.”

“Our England is a bonnie island,” said Shirley, “and Yorkshire is one of her bonniest nooks.”

“You are a Yorkshire girl too?”

“I am—Yorkshire in blood and birth. Five generations of my race sleep under the aisles of Briarfield Church: I drew my first breath in the old black hall behind us.”

Hereupon Caroline presented her hand, which was accordingly taken and shaken. “We are compatriots,” said she.

“Yes,” agreed Shirley, with a grave nod.

“And that,” asked Miss Keeldar, pointing to the forest,—“that is Nunnwood?”

“It is.”

“Were you ever there?”

“Many a time.”

“In the heart of it?”

“Yes.”

“What is it like?”

“It is like an encampment of forest sons of Anak. The trees are huge and old. When you stand at their roots, the summits seem in another region: the trunks remain still and firm as pillars, while the boughs sway to every breeze. In the deepest calm their leaves are never quite hushed, and in high wind a flood rushes—a sea thunders above you.”

“Was it not one of Robin Hood’s haunts?”

“Yes, and there are mementos of him still existing. To penetrate into Nunnwood, Miss Keeldar, is to go far back into the dim days of eld. Can you see a break in the forest, about the centre?”

“Yes, distinctly.”

“That break is a dell; a deep, hollow cup, lined with turf as green and short as the sod of this Common; the very oldest of the trees, gnarled, mighty oaks, crowd about the brink of this dell: in the bottom lie the ruins of a nunnery.”

“We will go—you and I alone, Caroline—to that wood, early some fine summer morning, and spend a long day there. We can take pencils and sketch-books, and any interesting reading-book we like; and of course we shall take something to eat. I have two little baskets, in which Mrs. Gill, my

housekeeper, might pack our provisions, and we could each carry our own. It would not tire you too much to walk so far?"

"Oh, no; especially if we rested the whole day in the wood, and I know all the pleasantest spots: I know where we could get nuts in nutting time; I know where wild strawberries abound; I know certain lonely, quite untrodden glades, carpeted with strange mosses, some yellow as if gilded, some a sober gray, some gem-green. I know groups of trees that ravish the eye with their perfect, picture-like effects: rude oak, delicate birch, glossy beech, clustered in contrast; and ash trees stately as Saul, standing isolated, and superannuated wood-giants clad in bright shrouds of ivy. Miss Keeldar, I could guide you."

"You would be dull with me alone?"

"I should not. I think we should suit: and what third person is there whose presence would not spoil our pleasure?"

"Indeed, I know of none about our own ages—no lady at least, and as to gentlemen ——"

"An excursion becomes quite a different thing when there are gentlemen of the party," interrupted Caroline.

"I agree with you—quite a different thing to what we were proposing."

"We were going simply to see the old trees, the old ruins; to pass a day in old times, surrounded by olden silence, and above all by quietude."

“You are right; and the presence of gentlemen dispels the last charm, I think. If they are of the wrong sort, like your Malones, and your young Sykes, and Wynnes, irritation takes the place of serenity. If they are of the right sort, there is still a change—I can hardly tell what change, one easy to feel, difficult to describe.”

“We forget Nature, *imprimis*.”

“And then Nature forgets us; covers her vast, calm brow with a dim veil, conceals her face, and withdraws the peaceful joy with which, if we had been content to worship her only, she would have filled our hearts.”

“What does she give us instead?”

“More elation and more anxiety: an excitement that steals the hours away fast, and a trouble that ruffles their course.”

“Our power of being happy lies a good deal in ourselves, I believe,” remarked Caroline, sagely. “I have gone to Nunnwood with a large party, all the curates and some other gentry of these parts, together with sundry ladies; and I found the affair insufferably tedious and absurd: and I have gone quite alone, or accompanied but by Fanny, who sat in the woodman’s hut and sewed, or talked to the goodwife, while I roamed about and made sketches, or read; and I have enjoyed much happiness of a quiet kind all day long. But that was when I was young—two years ago.”

“ Did you ever go with your cousin, Robert Moore ? ”

“ Yes ; once.”

“ What sort of a companion is he on these occasions ? ”

“ A cousin, you know, is different to a stranger.”

“ I am aware of that ; but cousins, if they are stupid, are still more insupportable than strangers, because you cannot so easily keep them at a distance. But your cousin is not stupid ? ”

“ No ; but—”

“ Well ? ”

“ If the company of fools irritates, as you say, the society of clever men leaves its own peculiar pain also. Where the goodness or talent of your friend is beyond and above all doubt, your own worthiness to be his associate often becomes a matter of question.”

“ Oh ! there I cannot follow you : that crotchet is not one I should choose to entertain for an instant. I consider myself not unworthy to be the associate of the best of them—of gentlemen, I mean : though that is saying a great deal. Where they are good, they are very good, I believe. Your uncle, by-the-by, is not a bad specimen of the elderly gentleman : I am always glad to see his brown, keen, sensible old face, either in my own house or any other. Are you fond of him ? Is he kind to you ? Now, speak the truth.”

“ He has brought me up from childhood, I doubt

not, precisely as he would have brought up his own daughter, if he had had one; and that is kindness; but I am not fond of him: I would rather be out of his presence than in it."

"Strange! when he has the art of making himself so agreeable."

"Yes, in company; but he is stern and silent at home. As he puts away his cane and shovel-hat in the Rectory-hall, so he locks his liveliness in his book-case and study-desk: the knitted brow and brief word for the fireside; the smile, the jest, the witty sally, for society."

"Is he tyrannical?"

"Not in the least: he is neither tyrannical nor hypocritical: he is simply a man who is rather liberal than good-natured, rather brilliant than genial, rather scrupulously equitable than truly just; if you can understand such superfine distinctions?"

"Oh! yes: good-nature implies indulgence, which he has not; geniality, warmth of heart, which he does not own; and genuine justice is the offspring of sympathy and considerateness, of which, I can well conceive, my bronzed old friend is quite innocent."

"I often wonder, Shirley, whether most men resemble my uncle in their domestic relations; whether it is necessary to be new and unfamiliar to them, in order to seem agreeable or estimable in their eyes; and whether it is impossible to their natures to retain a constant interest and affection for those they see every day."

“I don’t know: I can’t clear up your doubts. I ponder over similar ones myself sometimes. But, to tell you a secret, if I were convinced that they are necessarily and universally different from us—fickle, soon petrifying, unsympathizing—I would never marry. I should not like to find out that what I loved did not love me, that it was weary of me, and that whatever effort I might make to please would hereafter be worse than useless, since it was inevitably in its nature to change and become indifferent. That discovery once made, what should I long for? To go away—to remove from a presence where my society gave no pleasure.”

“But you could not, if you were married.”

“No, I could not,—there it is. I could never be my own mistress more. A terrible thought!—it suffocates me! Nothing irks me like the idea of being a burden and a bore,—an inevitable burden,—a ceaseless bore! Now, when I feel my company superfluous, I can comfortably fold my independence round me like a mantle, and drop my pride like a veil, and withdraw to solitude. If married, that could not be.”

“I wonder we don’t all make up our minds to remain single,” said Caroline: “we should if we listened to the wisdom of experience. My uncle always speaks of marriage as a burden; and I believe whenever he hears of a man being married, he invariably regards him as a fool, or, at any rate, as doing a foolish thing.”

“But, Caroline, men are not all like your uncle: surely not—I hope not.”

She paused and mused.

“I suppose we each find an exception in the one we love, till we *are* married,” suggested Caroline.

“I suppose so: and this exception we believe to be of sterling materials; we fancy it like ourselves; we imagine a sense of harmony. We think his voice gives the softest, truest promise of a heart that will never harden against us: we read in his eyes that faithful feeling—affection. I don’t think we should trust to what they call passion, at all, Caroline. I believe it is a mere fire of dry sticks, blazing up and vanishing: but we watch him, and see him kind to animals, to little children, to poor people. He is kind to us likewise—good—considerate: he does not flatter women, but he is patient with them, and he seems to be easy in their presence, and to find their company genial. He likes them not only for vain and selfish reasons, but as *we* like him,—because we like him. Then we observe that he is just—that he always speaks the truth—that he is conscientious. We feel joy and peace when he comes into a room: we feel sadness and trouble when he leaves it. We know that this man has been a kind son, that he is a kind brother: will any one dare to tell me that he will not be a kind husband?”

“My uncle would affirm it unhesitatingly. ‘He will be sick of you in a month,’ he would say.”

“Mrs. Pryor would seriously intimate the same.”

“Mrs. Yorke and Miss Mann would darkly suggest ditto.”

“If they are true oracles, it is good never to fall in love.”

“Very good, if you can avoid it.”

“I choose to doubt their truth.”

“I am afraid that proves you are already caught.”

“Not I: but if I were, do you know what sooth-sayers I would consult?”

“Let me hear.”

“Neither man nor woman, elderly nor young:—the little Irish beggar that comes barefoot to my door; the mouse that steals out of the cranny in the wainscot; the bird that in frost and snow pecks at my window for a crumb; the dog that licks my hand and sits beside my knee.”

“Did you ever see any one who was kind to such things?”

“Did you ever see any one whom such things seemed instinctively to follow, like, rely on?”

“We have a black cat and an old dog at the Rectory. I know somebody to whose knee that black cat loves to climb; against whose shoulder and cheek it likes to purr. The old dog always comes out of his kennel and wags his tail, and whines affectionately when somebody passes.”

“And what does that somebody do?”

“He quietly strokes the cat, and lets her sit while he conveniently can, and when he must disturb her by rising, he puts her softly down, and never

flings her from him roughly; he always whistles to the dog and gives him a caress."

"Does he? It is not Robert?"

"But it is Robert."

"Handsome fellow!" said Shirley, with enthusiasm: her eyes sparkled.

"Is he not handsome? Has he not fine eyes and well-cut features, and a clear, princely forehead?"

"He has all that, Caroline. Bless him! he is both graceful and good."

"I was sure you would see that he was: when I first looked at your face I knew you would."

"I was well inclined to him before I saw him. I liked him when I did see him: I admire him now. There is charm in beauty for itself, Caroline; when it is blent with goodness, there is a powerful charm."

"When mind is added, Shirley?"

"Who can resist it?"

"Remember my uncle, Mesdames Pryor, Yorke, and Mann."

"Remember the croaking of the frogs of Egypt! He is a noble being. I tell you when they *are* good, they are the lords of the creation,—they are the sons of God. Moulded in their Maker's image, the minutest spark of His spirit lifts them almost above mortality. Indisputably, a great, good, handsome man is the first of created things."

"Above us?"

"I would scorn to contend for empire with him,—I would scorn it. Shall my left hand dispute for

precedence with my right?—shall my heart quarrel with my pulse?—shall my veins be jealous of the blood which fills them?”

“Men and women, husbands and wives quarrel horribly, Shirley.”

“Poor things!—poor, fallen, degenerate things! God made them for another lot—for other feelings.”

“But are we men’s equals, or are we not?”

“Nothing ever charms me more than when I meet my superior—one who makes me sincerely feel that he is my superior.”

“Did you ever meet him?”

“I should be glad to see him any day: the higher above me, so much the better: it degrades to stoop—it is glorious to look up. What frets me is, that when I try to esteem, I am baffled: when religiously inclined, there are but false gods to adore. I disdain to be a Pagan.”

“Miss Keeldar, will you come in? We are here at the Rectory gates.”

“Not to-day; but to-morrow I shall fetch you to spend the evening with me. Caroline Helstone—if you really are what at present to me you seem—you and I will suit. I have never in my whole life been able to talk to a young lady as I have talked to you this morning. Kiss me—and good-bye.”

Mrs. Pryor seemed as well-disposed to cultivate Caroline’s acquaintance as Shirley. She, who went nowhere else, called on an early day at the Rectory.

She came in the afternoon, when the Rector happened to be out. It was rather a close day; the heat of the weather had flushed her, and she seemed fluttered, too, by the circumstance of entering a strange house; for it appeared her habits were most retiring and secluded. When Miss Helstone went to her in the dining-room, she found her seated on the sofa, trembling, fanning herself with her handkerchief, and seeming to contend with a nervous discomposure that threatened to become hysterical.

Caroline marvelled somewhat at this unusual want of self-command in a lady of her years, and also at the lack of real strength in one who appeared almost robust: for Mrs. Pryor hastened to allege the fatigue of her walk, the heat of the sun, &c., as reasons for her temporary indisposition; and still, as, with more hurry than coherence, she again and again enumerated these causes of exhaustion, Caroline gently sought to relieve her by opening her shawl and removing her bonnet. Attentions of this sort, Mrs. Pryor would not have accepted from every one: in general, she recoiled from touch or close approach, with a mixture of embarrassment and coldness far from flattering to those who offered her aid: to Miss Helstone's little light hand, however, she yielded tractably, and seemed soothed by its contact. In a few minutes she ceased to tremble, and grew quiet and tranquil.

Her usual manner being resumed, she proceeded to talk of ordinary topics. In a miscellaneous com-

pany, Mrs. Pryor rarely opened her lips; or, if obliged to speak, she spoke under restraint, and consequently not well; in dialogue, she was a good converser: her language, always a little formal, was well chosen; her sentiments were just; her information was varied and correct. Caroline felt it pleasant to listen to her: more pleasant than she could have anticipated.

On the wall opposite the sofa where they sat, hung three pictures: the centre one, above the mantelpiece, that of a lady; the two others, male portraits.

“That is a beautiful face,” said Mrs. Pryor, interrupting a brief pause which had followed half an hour’s animated conversation: “the features may be termed perfect; no statuary’s chisel could improve them: it is a portrait from the life, I presume?”

“It is a portrait of Mrs. Helstone.”

“Of Mrs. Matthewson Helstone? Of your uncle’s wife?”

“It is, and is said to be a good likeness: before her marriage, she was accounted the beauty of the district.”

“I should say she merited the distinction: what accuracy in all the lineaments! It is, however, a passive face: the original could not have been, what is generally termed, ‘a woman of spirit.’”

“I believe she was a remarkably still, silent person.”

“One would scarcely have expected, my dear, that

your uncle's choice should have fallen on a partner of that description. Is he not fond of being amused by lively chat?"

"In company he is; but he always says he could never do with a talking wife: he must have quiet at home. You go out to gossip, he affirms; you come home to read and reflect."

"Mrs. Matthewson lived but a few years after her marriage, I think I have heard?"

"About five years."

"Well, my dear," pursued Mrs. Pryor, rising to go, "I trust it is understood that you will frequently come to Fieldhead: I hope you will. You must feel lonely here, having no female relative in the house: you must necessarily pass much of your time in solitude."

"I am inured to it: I have grown up by myself. May I arrange your shawl for you?"

Mrs. Pryor submitted to be assisted.

"Should you chance to require help in your studies," she said, "you may command me."

Caroline expressed her sense of such kindness.

"I hope to have frequent conversations with you. I should wish to be of use to you."

Again, Miss Helstone returned thanks. She thought what a kind heart was hidden under her visitor's seeming chilliness. Observing that Mrs. Pryor again glanced with an air of interest towards the portraits, as she walked down the room, Caroline casually explained:—

“The likeness that hangs near the window, you will see, is my uncle, taken twenty years ago; the other, to the left of the mantelpiece, is his brother James, my father.”

“They resemble each other in some measure,” said Mrs. Pryor; “yet a difference of character may be traced in the different mould of the brow and mouth.”

“What difference?” inquired Caroline, accompanying her to the door. “James Helstone—that is, my father—is generally considered the best looking of the two: strangers, I remark, always exclaim what a handsome man! Do you think his picture handsome, Mrs. Pryor?”

“It is much softer or finer featured than that of your uncle.”

“But where or what is the difference of character to which you alluded? Tell me: I wish to see if you guess right.”

“My dear, your uncle is a man of principle: his forehead and his lips are firm, and his eye is steady.”

“Well, and the other? Do not be afraid of offending me: I always like the truth.”

“Do you like the truth? It is well for you: adhere to that preference—never swerve thence. The other, my dear, if he had been living now, would probably have furnished little support to his daughter. It is, however, a graceful head—taken in youth, I should think. My dear (turning abruptly), you acknowledge an inestimable value in principle?”

“I am sure no character can have true worth without it.”

“You feel what you say? You have considered the subject?”

“Often. Circumstances early forced it upon my attention.”

“The lesson was not lost then, though it came so prematurely. I suppose the soil is not light nor stony, otherwise seed falling in that season never would have borne fruit. My dear, do not stand in the air of the door, you will take cold: good-afternoon.”

Miss Helstone's new acquaintance soon became of value to her: their society was acknowledged a privilege. She found she would have been in error indeed, to have let slip this chance of relief—to have neglected to avail herself of this happy change: a turn was thereby given to her thoughts; a new channel was opened for them, which, diverting a few of them at least from the one direction in which all had hitherto tended, abated the impetuosity of their rush, and lessened the force of their pressure on one worn-down point.

Soon she was content to spend whole days at Fieldhead, doing by turns whatever Shirley or Mrs. Pryor wished her to do: and now one would claim her, now the other. Nothing could be less demonstrative than the friendship of the elder lady; but also nothing could be more vigilant, assiduous, untiring. I have intimated that she was a peculiar

personage; and in nothing was her peculiarity more shown than in the nature of the interest she evinced for Caroline. She watched all her movements: she seemed as if she would have guarded all her steps: it gave her pleasure to be applied to by Miss Helstone for advice and assistance; she yielded her aid, when asked, with such quiet yet obvious enjoyment, that Caroline ere long took delight in depending on her.

Shirley Keeldar's complete docility with Mrs. Pryor had at first surprised Miss Helstone, and not less the fact of the reserved ex-governess being so much at home and at ease in the residence of her young pupil, where she filled with such quiet independency a very dependent post; but she soon found that it needed but to know both ladies to comprehend fully the enigma. Every one, it seemed to her, must like, must love, must prize Mrs. Pryor when they knew her. No matter that she perseveringly wore old-fashioned gowns; that her speech was formal, and her manner cool; that she had twenty little ways such as nobody else had—she was still such a stay, such a counsellor, so truthful, so kind in her way, that, in Caroline's idea, none once accustomed to her presence could easily afford to dispense with it.

As to dependency or humiliation, Caroline did not feel it in her intercourse with Shirley, and why should Mrs. Pryor? The heiress was rich—very rich—compared with her new friend: one possessed a clear thousand a year—the other not a penny; and yet there was a safe sense of equality experienced in

her society, never known in that of the ordinary Briarfield and Whinbury gentry.

The reason was, Shirley's head ran on other things than money and position. She was glad to be independent as to property: by fits she was even elated at the notion of being lady of the manor, and having tenants and an estate: she was especially tickled with an agreeable complacency when reminded of "all that property" down in the Hollow, "comprising an excellent cloth-mill, dye-house, warehouse, together with the messuage, gardens, and outbuildings, termed Hollow's cottage;" but her exultation being quite undisguised was singularly inoffensive; and, for her serious thoughts, they tended elsewhere. To admire the great, reverence the good, and be joyous with the genial, was very much the bent of Shirley's soul; she mused therefore on the means of following this bent far oftener than she pondered on her social superiority.

In Caroline, Miss Keeldar had first taken an interest because she was quiet, retiring, looked delicate, and seemed as if she needed some one to take care of her. Her predilection increased greatly when she discovered that her own way of thinking and talking was understood and responded to by this new acquaintance. She had hardly expected it. Miss Helstone, she fancied, had too pretty a face, manners and voice too soft, to be anything out of the common way in mind and attainments; and she very much wondered to see the gentle features light up archly

to the reveillé of a dry sally or two risked by herself; and more did she wonder to discover the self-won knowledge treasured, and the untaught speculations working in that girlish, curl-veiled head. Caroline's instinct of taste, too, was like her own: such books as Miss Keeldar had read with the most pleasure, were Miss Helstone's delight also. They held many aversions too in common, and could have the comfort of laughing together over works of false sentimentality and pompous pretension.

Few, Shirley conceived, men or women have the right taste in poetry: the right sense for discriminating between what is real and what is false. She had again and again heard very clever people pronounce this or that passage, in this or that versifier, altogether admirable, which, when she read, her soul refused to acknowledge as anything but cant, flourish and tinsel, or, at the best, elaborate wordiness; curious, clever, learned perhaps; haply, even tinged with the fascinating hues of fancy, but, God knows, as different from real poetry as the gorgeous and massy vase of mosaic is from the little cup of pure metal; or, to give the reader a choice of similes, as the milliner's artificial wreath is from the fresh gathered lily of the field.

Caroline, she found, felt the value of the true ore, and knew the deception of the flashy dross. The minds of the two girls being toned in harmony, often chimed very sweetly together.

One evening, they chanced to be alone in the oak-

parlour. They had passed a long wet day together without ennui; it was now on the edge of dark; candles were not yet brought in; both, as twilight deepened, grew meditative and silent. A western wind roared high round the hall, driving wild clouds and stormy rain up from the far-remote ocean: all was tempest outside the antique lattices, all deep peace within. Shirley sat at the window, watching the rack in heaven, the mist on earth, listening to certain notes of the gale that plained like restless spirits—notes which, had she not been so young, gay, and healthy, would have swept her trembling nerves like some omen, some anticipatory dirge: in this her prime of existence and bloom of beauty, they but subdued vivacity to pensiveness. Snatches of sweet ballads haunted her ear; now and then she sang a stanza: her accents obeyed the fitful impulse of the wind; they swelled as its gusts rushed on, and died as they wandered away. Caroline, withdrawn to the farthest and darkest end of the room, her figure just discernible by the ruby shine of the flameless fire, was pacing to and fro, murmuring to herself fragments of well-remembered poetry. She spoke very low, but Shirley heard her; and, while singing softly, she listened. This was the strain:—

“ Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,
Washed headlong from on board,
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left.”

Here the fragment stopped; because Shirley's song, erewhile somewhat full and thrilling, had become delicately faint.

"Go on," said she.

"Then you go on, too. I was only repeating 'The Castaway.'"

"I know: if you can remember it all, say it all."

And as it was nearly dark, and, after all, Miss Keeldar was no formidable auditor, Caroline went through it. She went through it as she should have gone through it. The wild sea, the drowning mariner, the reluctant ship swept on in the storm, you heard were realized by her; and more vividly was realized the heart of the poet, who did not weep for the "The Castaway," but who, in an hour of tearless anguish, traced a semblance to his own God-abandoned misery in the fate of that man-forsaken sailor, and cried from the depths where he struggled:—

"No voice divine the storm allayed,
 No light propitious shone,
 When, snatched from all effectual aid,
 We perished—each alone!
 But I—beneath a rougher sea,
 And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he."

"I hope William Cowper is safe and calm in heaven now," said Caroline.

"Do you pity what he suffered on earth?" asked Miss Keeldar.

"Pity him, Shirley? What can I do else? He

was nearly broken-hearted when he wrote that poem, and it almost breaks one's heart to read it. But he found relief in writing it—I know he did; and that gift of poetry—the most divine bestowed on man—was, I believe, granted to allay emotions when their strength threatens harm. It seems to me, Shirley, that nobody should write poetry to exhibit intellect or attainment. Who cares for that sort of poetry? Who cares for learning—who cares for fine words in poetry? And who does not care for feeling—real feeling—however simply, even rudely expressed?”

“It seems you care for it, at all events: and certainly, in hearing that poem, one discovers that Cowper was under an impulse strong as that of the wind which drove the ship—an impulse which, while it would not suffer him to stop to add ornament to a single stanza, filled him with force to achieve the whole with consummate perfection. You managed to recite it with a steady voice, Caroline: I wonder thereat.”

“Cowper's hand did not tremble in writing the lines: why should my voice falter in repeating them? Depend on it, Shirley, no tear blistered the manuscript of ‘The Castaway.’ I hear in it no sob of sorrow, only the cry of despair; but, that cry uttered, I believe the deadly spasm passed from his heart; that he wept abundantly, and was comforted.”

Shirley resumed her ballad minstrelsy. Stopping short, she remarked ere long:

“One could have loved Cowper, if it were only

for the sake of having the privilege of comforting him."

"You never would have loved Cowper," rejoined Caroline, promptly: "he was not made to be loved by woman."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. I know there is a kind of natures in the world—and very noble, elevated natures, too—whom love never comes near. You might have sought Cowper with the intention of loving him; and you would have looked at him, pitied him, and left him: forced away by a sense of the impossible, the incongruous, as the crew were borne from their drowning comrade by 'the furious blast.'"

"You may be right. Who told you this?"

"And what I say of Cowper, I should say of Rousseau. Was Rousseau ever loved? He loved passionately; but was his passion ever returned? I am certain, never. And if there were any female Cowpers and Rousseaus, I should assert the same of them."

"Who told you this, I ask? Did Moore?"

"Why should anybody have told me? Have I not an instinct? Can I not divine by analogy? Moore never talked to me either about Cowper, or Rousseau, or love. The voice we hear in solitude told me all I know on these subjects."

"Do you like characters of the Rousseau order, Caroline?"

“Not at all, as a whole. I sympathize intensely with certain qualities they possess: certain divine sparks in their nature dazzle my eyes, and make my soul glow. Then, again, I scorn them. They are made of clay and gold. The refuse and the ore make a mass of weakness: taken altogether, I feel them unnatural, unhealthy, repulsive.”

“I dare say I should be more tolerant of a Rousseau than you would, Cary: submissive and contemplative yourself, you like the stern and the practical. By-the-way, you must miss that Cousin Robert of yours very much, now that you and he never meet?”

“I do.”

“And he must miss you?”

“That he does not.”

“I cannot imagine,” pursued Shirley, who had lately got a habit of introducing Moore’s name into the conversation, even when it seemed to have no business there,—“I cannot imagine but that he was fond of you, since he took so much notice of you, talked to you, and taught you so much.”

“He never was fond of me: he never professed to be fond of me. He took pains to prove that he only just tolerated me.”

Caroline, determined not to err on the flattering side in estimating her cousin’s regard for her, always now habitually thought of it and mentioned it in the most scanty measure. She had her own reasons for being less sanguine than ever in hopeful views of the

future : less indulgent to pleasurable retrospections of the past.

“Of course, then,” observed Miss Keeldar, “you only just tolerated him, in return?”

“Shirley, men and women are so different : they are in such a different position. Women have so few things to think about—men so many : you may have a friendship for a man, while he is almost indifferent to you. Much of what cheers your life may be dependent on him, while not a feeling or interest of moment in his eyes may have reference to you. Robert used to be in the habit of going to London, sometimes for a week or a fortnight together ; well, while he was away, I found his absence a void : there was something wanting ; Briarfield was duller. Of course, I had my usual occupations ; still I missed him. As I sat by myself in the evenings, I used to feel a strange certainty of conviction I cannot describe : that if a magician or a genius had, at that moment, offered me Prince Ali’s tube (you remember it in the Arabian Nights ?), and if, with its aid, I had been enabled to take a view of Robert—to see where he was, how occupied—I should have learned, in a startling manner, the width of the chasm which gaped between such as he and such as I. I knew that, however my thoughts might adhere to him, his were effectually sundered from me.”

“Caroline,” demanded Miss Keeldar, abruptly, “don’t you wish you had a profession—a trade?”

“I wish it fifty times a day. As it is, I often

wonder what I came into the world for. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands, and to occupy my thoughts."

"Can labour alone make a human being happy?"

"No; but it can give varieties of pain, and prevent us from breaking our hearts with a single tyrant master-torture. Besides, successful labour has its recompense; a vacant, weary, lonely, hopeless life has none."

"But hard labour and learned professions, they say, make women masculine, coarse, unwomanly."

"And what does it signify, whether unmarried and never-to-be-married women are unattractive and inelegant, or not?—provided only they are decent, decorous, and neat, it is enough. The utmost which ought to be required of old maids, in the way of appearance, is that they should not absolutely offend men's eyes as they pass them in the street; for the rest, they should be allowed, without too much scorn, to be as absorbed, grave, plain-looking, and plain-dressed as they please."

"You might be an old maid yourself, Caroline, you speak so earnestly."

"I shall be one: it is my destiny. I will never marry a Malone or a Sykes—and no one else will ever marry me."

Here fell a long pause: Shirley broke it. Again the name by which she seemed bewitched was almost the first on her lips.

"Lina—did not Moore call you Lina sometimes?"

“Yes: it is sometimes used as the abbreviation of Caroline in his native country.”

“Well, Lina, do you remember my one day noticing an inequality in your hair—a curl wanting on that right side—and your telling me that it was Robert’s fault, as he had once cut therefrom a long lock?”

“Yes.”

“If he is, and always was, as indifferent to you as you say, why did he steal your hair?”

“I don’t know—yes, I do: it was my doing, not his. Everything of that sort always was my doing. He was going from home, to London, as usual; and the night before he went, I had found in his sister’s workbox a lock of black hair—a short, round curl: Hortense told me it was her brother’s, and a keepsake. He was sitting near the table; I looked at his head—he has plenty of hair; on the temples were many such round curls. I thought he could spare me one: I knew I should like to have it, and I asked for it. He said, on condition that he might have his choice of a tress from my head; so he got one of my long locks of hair, and I got one of his short ones. I keep his, but, I dare say, he has lost mine. It was my doing, and one of those silly deeds it distresses the heart and sets the face on fire to think of: one of those small but sharp recollections that return, lacerating your self-respect like tiny penknives, and forcing from your lips, as you sit alone, sudden, insane-sounding interjections.”

“Caroline!”

“I *do* think myself a fool, Shirley, in some respects : I *do* despise myself. But I said I would not make you my confessor ; for you cannot reciprocate foible for foible : you are not weak. How steadily you watch me now ! turn aside your clear, strong, she-eagle eye : it is an insult to fix it on me thus.”

“What a study of character you are ! Weak, certainly ; but not in the sense you think.—Come in !”

This was said in answer to a tap at the door. Miss Keeldar happened to be near it at the moment, Caroline at the other end of the room : she saw a note put into Shirley’s hands, and heard the words—

“From Mr. Moore, ma’am.”

“Bring candles,” said Miss Keeldar.

Caroline sat expectant.

“A communication on business,” said the heiress ; but when candles were brought, she neither opened nor read it. The Rector’s Fanny was presently announced, and the Rector’s niece went home.

CHAPTER II.

FURTHER COMMUNICATIONS ON BUSINESS.

IN Shirley's nature prevailed at times an easy indolence: there were periods when she took delight in perfect vacancy of hand and eye—moments when her thoughts, her simple existence, the fact of the world being around—and heaven above her, seemed to yield her such fulness of happiness, that she did not need to lift a finger to increase the joy. Often, after an active morning, she would spend a sunny afternoon in lying stirless on the turf, at the foot of some tree of friendly umbrage: no society did she need but that of Caroline, and it sufficed if she were within call; no spectacle did she ask but that of the deep blue sky, and such cloudlets as sailed afar and aloft across its span; no sound but that of the bee's hum, the leaf's whisper. Her sole book in such hours was the dim chronicle of memory, or the sybil page of anticipation; from her young eyes fell on each volume a glorious light to read by; round her lips at moments played a smile which revealed glimpses of the tale or prophecy: it

was not sad, not dark. Fate had been benign to the blissful dreamer, and promised to favour her yet again. In her past were sweet passages; in her future rosy hopes.

Yet one day when Caroline drew near to rouse her, thinking she had lain long enough, behold, as she looked down, Shirley's cheek was wet as if with dew: those fine eyes of hers shone humid and brimming.

"Shirley, why do *you* cry?" asked Caroline, involuntarily laying stress on *you*.

Miss Keeldar smiled, and turned her picturesque head towards the questioner. "Because it pleases me mightily to cry," she said; "my heart is both sad and glad: but why, you good, patient child—why do you not bear me company? I only weep tears, delightful and soon wiped away: you might weep gall, if you choose."

"Why should I weep gall?"

"Mateless, solitary bird!" was the only answer.

"And are not you, too, mateless, Shirley?"

"At heart—no."

"Oh! who nestles there, Shirley?"

But Shirley only laughed gaily at this question, and alertly started up.

"I have dreamed," she said: "a mere day-dream; certainly bright, probably baseless!"

Miss Helstone was by this time free enough from illusions: she took a sufficiently grave view of the future, and fancied she knew pretty well how her

own destiny and that of some others were tending. Yet old associations retained their influence over her, and it was these, and the power of habit, which still frequently drew her of an evening to the field-stile and the old thorn overlooking the Hollow.

One night, the night after the incident of the note, she had been at her usual post, watching for her beacon—watching vainly; that evening no lamp was lit. She waited till the rising of certain constellations warned her of lateness, and signed her away. In passing Fieldhead, on her return, its moonlight beauty attracted her glance, and stayed her step an instant. Tree and hall rose peaceful under the night sky and clear full orb; pearly paleness gilded the building; mellow brown gloom bosomed it round; shadows of deep green brooded above its oak-wreathed roof. The broad pavement in front shone pale also; it gleamed as if some spell had transformed the dark granite to glistening Parian: on the silvery space slept two sable shadows, thrown sharply defined from two human figures. These figures when first seen were motionless and mute; presently they moved in harmonious step, and spoke low in harmonious key. Earnest was the gaze that scrutinized them as they emerged from behind the trunk of the cedar. “Is it Mrs. Pryor and Shirley?”

Certainly it is Shirley. Who else has a shape so lithe, and proud, and graceful? And her face, too, is visible: her countenance careless and pensive, and musing and mirthful, and mocking and tender. Not

fearing the dew, she has not covered her head; her curls are free: they veil her neck and caress her shoulder with their tendril rings. An ornament of gold gleams through the half-closed folds of the scarf she has wrapped across her bust, and a large bright gem glitters on the white hand which confines it. Yes, that is Shirley.

Her companion then is, of course, Mrs. Pryor?

Yes, if Mrs. Pryor owns six feet of stature, and if she has changed her decent widow's weeds for masculine disguise. The figure walking at Miss Keeldar's side is a man—a tall, young, stately man—it is her tenant, Robert Moore.

The pair speak softly, their words are not distinguishable: to remain a moment to gaze is not to be an eaves-dropper; and as the moon shines so clearly and their countenances are so distinctly apparent, who can resist the attraction of such interest? Caroline it seems cannot, for she lingers.

There was a time when, on summer nights, Moore had been wont to walk with his cousin, as he was now walking with the heiress. Often had she gone up the Hollow with him after sunset, to scent the freshness of the earth, where a growth of fragrant herbage carpeted a certain narrow terrace, edging a deep ravine, from whose rifted gloom was heard a sound like the spirit of the lonely watercourse, moaning amongst its wet stones, and between its weedy banks, and under its dark bower of alders.

“But I used to be closer to him,” thought Caro-

line: "he felt no obligation to treat me with homage; I needed only kindness. He used to hold my hand: he does not touch hers. And yet Shirley is not proud where she loves. There is no haughtiness in her aspect now, only a little in her port; what is natural to and inseparable from her: what she retains in her most careless as in her most guarded moments. Robert must think as I think, that he is at this instant looking down on a fine face; and he must think it with a man's brain, not with mine. She has such generous, yet soft fire in her eyes. She smiles—what makes her smile so sweet? I saw that Robert felt its beauty, and he must have felt it with his man's heart, not with my dim woman's perceptions. They look to me like two great happy spirits: yonder silvered pavement reminds me of that white shore we believe to be beyond the death-flood: they have reached it, they walked there united. And what am I—standing here in shadow, shrinking into concealment, my mind darker than my hiding-place? I am one of this world, no spirit—a poor, doomed mortal, who asks, in ignorance and hopelessness, wherefore she was born, to what end she lives; whose mind for ever runs on the question, how she shall at last encounter, and by whom be sustained through death?

"This is the worst passage I have come to yet: still I was quite prepared for it. I gave Robert up, and gave him up to Shirley, the first day I heard she

was come : the first moment I saw her—rich, youthful, and lovely. She has him now : he is her lover ; she is his darling : she will be far more his darling yet when they are married : the more Robert knows of Shirley, the more his soul will cleave to her. They will both be happy, and I do not grudge them their bliss ; but I groan under my own misery : some of my suffering is very acute. Truly, I ought not to have been born : they should have smothered me at the first cry.”

Here, Shirley stepping aside to gather a dewy flower, she and her companion turned into a path that lay nearer the gate : some of their conversation became audible. Caroline would not stay to listen : she passed away noiselessly, and the moonlight kissed the wall which her shadow had dimmed. The reader is privileged to remain, and try what he can make of the discourse.

“ I cannot conceive why Nature did not give you a bulldog’s head, for you have all a bulldog’s tenacity,” said Shirley.

“ Not a flattering idea : am I so ignoble ?”

“ And something also you have of the same animal’s silent ways of going about its work : you give no warning ; you come noiselessly behind, seize fast, and hold on.”

“ This is guess-work ; you have witnessed no such feat on my part : in your presence I have been no bulldog.”

“ Your very silence indicates your race. How

little you talk in general, yet how deeply you scheme! You are far-seeing; you are calculating."

"I know the ways of these people. I have gathered information of their intentions. My note last night informed you that Barraclough's trial had ended in his conviction and sentence to transportation: his associates will plot vengeance: I shall lay my plans so as to counteract, or, at least, be prepared for theirs; that is all. Having now given you as clear an explanation as I can, am I to understand that for what I propose doing I have your approbation?"

"I shall stand by you so long as you remain on the defensive. Yes."

"Good! Without any aid—even opposed or disapproved by you—I believe I should have acted precisely as I now intend to act; but in another spirit. I now feel satisfied. On the whole, I relish the position."

"I dare say you do; that is evident: you relish the work which lies before you still better than you would relish the execution of a government order for army-cloth."

"I certainly feel it congenial."

"So would old Helstone. It is true there is a shade of difference in your motives: many shades, perhaps. Shall I speak to Mr. Helstone? I will, if you like."

"Act as you please: your judgment, Miss Keel-

dar, will guide you accurately. I could rely on it myself, in a more difficult crisis; but I should inform you, Mr. Helstone is somewhat prejudiced against me at present."

"I am aware, I have heard all about your differences: depend upon it they will melt away; he cannot resist the temptation of an alliance under present circumstances."

"I should be glad to have him: he is of true metal."

"I think so also."

"An old blade, and rusted somewhat; but the edge and temper still excellent."

"Well, you shall have him, Mr. Moore: that is, if I can win him."

"Whom can you not win?"

"Perhaps not the Rector; but I will make the effort."

"Effort! He will yield for a word—a smile."

"By no means. It will cost me several cups of tea, some toast and cake, and an ample measure of remonstrances, expostulations, and persuasions. It grows rather chill."

"I perceive you shiver. Am I acting wrongly to detain you here? Yet it is so calm: I even feel it warm; and society such as yours is a pleasure to me so rare—if you were wrapped in a thicker shawl?"

"I might stay longer, and forget how late it is, which would chagrin Mrs. Pryor. We keep early

and regular hours at Fieldhead, Mr. Moore; and so, I am sure, does your sister at the cottage."

"Yes; but Hortense and I have an understanding the most convenient in the world, that we shall each do as we please."

"How do you please to do?"

"Three nights in the week I sleep in the mill: but I require little rest; and when it is moonlight and mild, I often haunt the Hollow till daybreak."

"When I was a very little girl, Mr. Moore, my nurse used to tell me tales of fairies being seen in that Hollow. That was before my father built the mill, when it was a perfectly solitary ravine: you will be falling under enchantment."

"I fear it is done," said Moore, in a low voice.

"But there are worse things than fairies to be guarded against," pursued Miss Keeldar.

"Things more perilous," he subjoined.

"Far more so. For instance, how would you like to meet Michael Hartley, that mad Calvinist and Jacobin weaver? They say he is addicted to poaching, and often goes abroad at night with his gun."

"I have already had the luck to meet him. We held a long argument together one night. A strange little incident it was: I liked it."

"Liked it? I admire your taste! Michael is not sane. Where did you meet him?"

"In the deepest, shadiest spot in the glen, where the water runs low, under brushwood. We sat

down near that plank bridge. It was moonlight, but clouded, and very windy. We had a talk."

"On politics?"

"And religion. I think the moon was at the full, and Michael was as near crazed as possible: he uttered strange blasphemy in his Antinomian fashion."

"Excuse me, but I think you must have been nearly as mad as he, to sit listening to him."

"There is a wild interest in his ravings. The man would be half a poet, if he were not wholly a maniac; and perhaps a prophet, if he were not a profligate. He solemnly informed me that hell was foreordained my inevitable portion; that he read the mark of the beast on my brow; that I had been an outcast from the beginning. God's vengeance, he said, was preparing for me, and affirmed that in a vision of the night he had beheld the manner and the instrument of my doom. I wanted to know further, but he left me with these words, 'The end is not yet.'"

"Have you ever seen him since?"

"About a month afterwards, in returning from market: I encountered him and Moses Barraclough both in an advanced stage of inebriation: they were praying in frantic sort at the roadside. They accosted me as Satan, bid me avaunt, and clamoured to be delivered from temptation. Again, but a few days ago, Michael took the trouble of appearing at the counting-house door, hatless, in his shirt-

sleeves,—his coat and castor having been detained at the public-house in pledge: he delivered himself of the comfortable message that he could wish Mr. Moore to set his house in order, as his soul was likely shortly to be required of him.”

“Do you make light of these things?”

“The poor man had been drinking for weeks, and was in a state bordering on delirium tremens.”

“What then? He is the more likely to attempt the fulfilment of his own prophecies.”

“It would not do to permit incidents of this sort to affect one’s nerves.”

“Mr. Moore, go home!”

“So soon?”

“Pass straight down the fields, not round by the lane and plantations.”

“It is early yet.”

“It is late: for my part, I am going in. Will you promise me not to wander in the Hollow to-night?”

“If you wish it.”

“I do wish it. May I ask whether you consider life valueless?”

“By no means: on the contrary, of late I regard my life as invaluable.”

“Of late?”

“Existence is neither aimless nor hopeless to me now; and it was both three months ago. I was then drowning, and rather wished the operation over. All at once a hand was stretched to me,—

such a delicate hand, I scarcely dared trust it :—its strength, however, has rescued me from ruin.”

“ Are you really rescued ? ”

“ For the time : your assistance has given me another chance.”

“ Live to make the best of it. Don't offer yourself as a target to Michael Hartley, and good-night ! ”

Miss Helstone was under a promise to spend the evening of the next day at Fieldhead : she kept her promise. Some gloomy hours had she spent in the interval. Most of the time had been passed shut up in her own apartment ; only issuing from it, indeed, to join her uncle at meals, and anticipating inquiries from Fanny by telling her that she was busy altering a dress, and preferred sewing up-stairs, to avoid interruption.

She did sew : she plied her needle continuously, ceaselessly ; but her brain worked faster than her fingers. Again, and more intensely than ever, she desired a fixed occupation,—no matter how onerous, how irksome. Her uncle must be once more entreated, but first she would consult Mrs. Pryor. Her head laboured to frame projects as diligently as her hands to plait and stitch the thin texture of the muslin summer dress spread on the little white couch at the foot of which she sat. Now and then, while thus doubly occupied, a tear would fill her eyes and fall on her busy hands ; but this sign of emotion was rare, and quickly effaced : the sharp pang passed,

the dimness cleared from her vision; she would re-thread her needle, re-arrange tuck and trimming, and work on.

Late in the afternoon she dressed herself: she reached Fieldhead, and appeared in the oak parlour just as tea was brought in. Shirley asked her why she came so late.

“Because I have been making my dress,” said she. “These fine sunny days began to make me ashamed of my winter merino; so I have furbished up a lighter garment.”

“In which you look as I like to see you,” said Shirley. “You are a lady-like little person, Caroline: is she not, Mrs. Pryor?”

Mrs. Pryor never paid compliments, and seldom indulged in remarks, favourable or otherwise, on personal appearance. On the present occasion she only swept Caroline’s curls from her cheek as she took a seat near her, caressed the oval outline, and observed,—

“You get somewhat thin, my love, and somewhat pale. Do you sleep well? Your eyes have a languid look,” and she gazed at her anxiously.

“I sometimes dream melancholy dreams,” answered Caroline; “and if I lie awake for an hour or two in the night, I am continually thinking of the Rectory as a dreary old place. You know it is very near the churchyard: the back part of the house is extremely ancient, and it is said that the out-kitchens there were once enclosed in the churchyard, and that

there are graves under them. I rather long to leave the Rectory."

"My dear! You are surely not superstitious?"

"No, Mrs. Pryor; but I think I grow what is called nervous. I see things under a darker aspect than I used to do. I have fears I never used to have—not of ghosts, but of omens and disastrous events; and I have an inexpressible weight on my mind which I would give the world to shake off, and I cannot do it."

"Strange!" cried Shirley. "I never feel so." Mrs. Pryor said nothing.

"Fine weather, pleasant days, pleasant scenes are powerless to give me pleasure," continued Caroline. "Calm evenings are not calm to me: moonlight, which I used to think mild, now only looks mournful. Is this weakness of mind, Mrs. Pryor, or what is it? I cannot help it: I often struggle against it: I reason; but reason and effort make no difference."

"You should take more exercise," said Mrs. Pryor.

"Exercise! I exercise sufficiently: I exercise till I am ready to drop."

"My dear, you should go from home."

"Mrs. Pryor, I should like to go from home, but not on any purposeless excursion or visit. I wish to be a governess as you have been. It would oblige me greatly if you would speak to my uncle on the subject."

"Nonsense," broke in Shirley. "What an idea!"

Be a governess ! Better be a slave at once. Where is the necessity of it ? Why should you dream of such a painful step ?”

“ My dear,” said Mrs. Pryor, “ you are very young to be a governess, and not sufficiently robust : the duties a governess undertakes are often severe.”

“ And I believe I want severe duties to occupy me.”

“ Occupy you !” cried Shirley. “ When are you idle ? I never saw a more industrious girl than you : you are always at work. Come,” she continued, —“ come and sit by my side, and take some tea to refresh you. You don’t care much for my friendship, then, that you wish to leave me ?”

“ Indeed I do, Shirley ; and I don’t wish to leave you. I shall never find another friend so dear.”

At which words Miss Keeldar put her hand into Caroline’s with an impulsively affectionate movement, which was well seconded by the expression of her face.

“ If you think so, you had better make much of me,” she said, “ and not run away from me. I hate to part with those to whom I am become attached. Mrs. Pryor there sometimes talks of leaving me, and says I might make a more advantageous connection than herself. I should as soon think of exchanging an old-fashioned mother for something modish and stylish. As for you—why I began to flatter myself we were thoroughly friends ; that you liked Shirley

almost as well as Shirley likes you : and she does not stint her regard."

"I *do* like Shirley : I like her more and more every day ; but that does not make me strong or happy."

"And would it make you strong or happy to go and live as a dependant amongst utter strangers ? It would not ; and the experiment must not be tried. I tell you it would fail : it is not in your nature to bear the desolate life governesses generally lead : you would fall ill : I won't hear of it."

And Miss Keeldar paused, having uttered this prohibition very decidedly. Soon she recommenced, still looking somewhat "courroucée":—

"Why, it is my daily pleasure now to look out for the little cottage bonnet and the silk scarf glancing through the trees in the lane, and to know that my quiet, shrewd, thoughtful companion and monitress is coming back to me : that I shall have her sitting in the room to look at, to talk to, or to let alone, as she and I please. This may be a selfish sort of language — I know it is ; but it is the language which naturally rises to my lips ; therefore I utter it."

"I would write to you, Shirley."

"And what are letters ? Only a sort of pis-aller. Drink some tea, Caroline : eat something—you eat nothing ; laugh and be cheerful, and stay at home."

Miss Helstone shook her head and sighed. She felt what difficulty she would have to persuade any one to assist or sanction her in making that change in her life which she believed desirable. Might she

only follow her own judgment, she thought she should be able to find, perhaps a harsh, but an effectual cure for her sufferings. But this judgment, founded on circumstances she could fully explain to none, least of all to Shirley, seemed, in all eyes but her own, incomprehensible and fantastic, and was opposed accordingly.

There really was no present pecuniary need for her to leave a comfortable home and "take a situation;" and there was every probability that her uncle might in some way permanently provide for her. So her friends thought, and, as far as their lights enabled them to see, they reasoned correctly: but of Caroline's strange sufferings, which she desired so eagerly to overcome or escape, they had no idea,—of her racked nights and dismal days, no suspicion. It was at once impossible and hopeless to explain: to wait and endure was her only plan. Many that want food and clothing have cheerier lives and brighter prospects than she had; many, harassed by poverty, are in a strait less afflictive.

"Now, is your mind quieted?" inquired Shirley. "Will you consent to stay at home?"

"I shall not leave it against the approbation of my friends," was the reply; "but I think in time they will be obliged to think as I do."

During this conversation Mrs. Pryor looked far from easy. Her extreme habitual reserve would rarely permit her to talk freely, or to interrogate others closely. She could think a multitude of questions she never ventured to put; give advice in

her mind which her tongue never delivered. Had she been alone with Caroline, she might possibly have said something to the point: Miss Keeldar's presence, accustomed as she was to it, sealed her lips. Now, as on a thousand other occasions, inexplicable nervous scruples kept her back from interfering. She merely showed her concern for Miss Helstone in an indirect way, by asking her if the fire made her too warm, placing a screen between her chair and the hearth, closing a window whence she imagined a draught proceeded, and often and restlessly glancing at her. Shirley resumed,—

“Having destroyed your plan,” she said, “which I hope I have done, I shall construct a new one of my own. Every summer I make an excursion. This season I propose spending two months either at the Scotch lochs or the English lakes: that is, I shall go there, provided you consent to accompany me: if you refuse, I shall not stir a foot.”

“You are very good, Shirley.”

“I would be very good, if you would let me: I have every disposition to be good. It is my misfortune and habit, I know, to think of myself paramount to anybody else: but who is not like me in that respect? However, when Captain Keeldar is made comfortable, accommodated with all he wants, including a sensible genial comrade, it gives him a thorough pleasure to devote his spare efforts to making that comrade happy. And should we not be happy, Caroline, in the Highlands? We will go

to the Highlands. We will, if you can bear a sea-voyage, go to the Isles,—the Hebrides, the Shetland, the Orkney Islands. Would you not like that? I see you would: Mrs. Pryor, I call you to witness; her face is all sunshine at the bare mention of it.”

“I should like it much,” returned Caroline; to whom, indeed, the notion of such a tour was not only pleasant, but gloriously reviving. Shirley rubbed her hands.

“Come, I can bestow a benefit,” she exclaimed. “I can do a good deed with my cash. My thousand a year is not merely a matter of dirty bank-notes and jaundiced guineas (let me speak respectfully of both though, for I adore them); but, it may be, health to the drooping, strength to the weak, consolation to the sad. I was determined to make something of it better than a fine old house to live in, than satin gowns to wear; better than deference from acquaintance, and homage from the poor. Here is to begin. This summer—Caroline, Mrs. Pryor, and I go out into the North Atlantic, beyond the Shetland—perhaps to the Faroe Isles. We will see seals in Suderoe, and, doubtless, mermaids in Stromoe. Caroline is laughing, Mrs. Pryor: *I* made her laugh; *I* have done her good.”

“I shall like to go, Shirley,” again said Miss Helstone. “I long to hear the sound of waves—ocean-waves, and to see them as I have imagined them in dreams, like tossing banks of green light, strewed with vanishing and re-appearing wreaths of foam,

whiter than lilies. I shall delight to pass the shores of those lone rock-islets where the sea-birds live and breed unmolested. We shall be on the track of the old Scandinavians — of the Norsemen : we shall almost see the shores of Norway. This is a very vague delight that I feel, communicated by your proposal, but it *is* a delight.”

“Will you think of Fitful-Head now, when you lie awake at night; of gulls shrieking round it, and waves tumbling in upon it, rather than of the graves under the Rectory back-kitchen?”

“I will try; and instead of musing about remnants of shrouds, and fragments of coffins, and human bones and mould, I will fancy seals lying in the sunshine on solitary shores, where neither fisherman nor hunter ever come; of rock-crevices full of pearly eggs bedded in sea-weed; of unscared birds covering white sands in happy flocks.”

“And what will become of that inexpressible weight you said you had on your mind?”

“I will try to forget it in speculation on the sway of the whole Great Deep above a herd of whales rushing through the livid and liquid thunder down from the frozen zone: a hundred of them, perhaps, wallowing, flashing, rolling in the wake of a patriarch bull, huge enough to have been spawned before the flood: such a creature as poor Smart had in his mind when he said,—

‘ Strong against tides, the enormous whale
Emerges as he goes.’ ”

“I hope our bark will meet with no such shoal, or herd, as you term it, Caroline: (I suppose you fancy the sea-mammoths pasturing about the bases of the ‘everlasting hills,’ devouring strange provender in the vast valleys through and above which sea-billows roll). I should not like to be capsized by the patriarch bull.”

“I suppose you expect to see mermaids, Shirley?”

“One of them, at any rate: I do not bargain for less: and she is to appear in some such fashion as this. I am to be walking by myself on deck, rather late of an August evening, watching and being watched by a full harvest-moon: something is to rise white on the surface of the sea, over which that moon mounts silent, and hangs glorious: the object glitters and sinks. It rises again. I think I hear it cry with an articulate voice: I call you up from the cabin: I show you an image, fair as alabaster, emerging from the dim wave. We both see the long hair, the lifted and foam-white arm, the oval mirror brilliant as a star. It glides nearer: a human face is plainly visible; a face in the style of yours, whose straight, pure (excuse the word, it is appropriate),—whose straight, pure lineaments, paleness does not disfigure. It looks at us, but not with your eyes. I see a preternatural lure in its wily glance: it beckons. Were we men, we should spring at the sign, the cold billow would be dared for the sake of the colder enchantress; being women,

we stand safe, though not dreadless. She comprehends our unmoved gaze ; she feels herself powerless : anger crosses her front ; she cannot charm, but she will appal us : she rises high, and glides all revealed, on the dark wave-ridge. Temptress-terror ! monstrous likeness of ourselves ! Are you not glad, Caroline, when at last, and with a wild shriek, she dives ? ”

“ But, Shirley, she is not like us : we are neither temptresses, nor terrors, nor monsters. ”

“ Some of our kind, it is said, are all three. There are men who ascribe to ‘ woman,’ in general, such attributes. ”

“ My dears, ” here interrupted Mrs. Pryor, “ does it not strike you that your conversation for the last ten minutes has been rather fanciful ? ”

“ But there is no harm in our fancies : is there, ma’am ? ”

“ We are aware that mermaids do not exist : why speak of them as if they did ? How can you find interest in speaking of a nonentity ? ”

“ I don’t know, ” said Shirley.

“ My dear, I think there is an arrival. I heard a step in the lane, while you were talking ; and is not that the garden-gate which creaks ? ”

Shirley stepped to the window.

“ Yes, there is some one, ” said she, turning quietly away : and, as she resumed her seat, a sensitive flush animated her face, while a trembling ray at once kindled and softened her eye. She raised

her hand to her chin, cast her gaze down, and seemed to think as she waited.

The servant announced Mr. Moore, and Shirley turned round when Mr. Moore appeared at the door. His figure seemed very tall as he entered, and stood in contrast with the three ladies, none of whom could boast a stature much beyond the average. He was looking well, better than he had been known to look for the past twelve months: a sort of renewed youth glowed in his eye and colour, and an invigorated hope and settled purpose sustained his bearing: firmness his countenance still indicated, but not austerity: it looked as cheerful as it was earnest.

“I am just returned from Stilbro’,” he said to Miss Keeldar, as he greeted her; “and I thought I would call to impart to you the result of my mission.”

“You did right not to keep me in suspense,” she said; “and your visit is well-timed. Sit down: we have not finished tea. Are you English enough to relish tea; or do you faithfully adhere to coffee?”

Moore accepted tea.

“I am learning to be a naturalized Englishman,” said he; “my foreign habits are leaving me one by one.”

And now he paid his respects to Mrs. Pryor, and paid them well, with a grave modesty that became his age, compared with hers. Then he looked at Caroline — not, however, for the first time — his glance had fallen upon her before: he bent towards

her as she sat, gave her his hand, and asked her how she was. The light from the window did not fall upon Miss Helstone, her back was turned towards it: a quiet though rather low reply, a still demeanour, and the friendly protection of early twilight, kept out of view each traitorous symptom. None could affirm that she had trembled or blushed, that her heart had quaked, or her nerves thrilled: none could prove emotion: a greeting showing less effusion was never interchanged. Moore took the empty chair near her, opposite Miss Keeldar. He had placed himself well: his neighbour, screened by the very closeness of his vicinage from his scrutiny, and sheltered further by the dusk which deepened each moment, soon regained, not merely *seeming*, but *real* mastery of the feelings which had started into insurrection at the first announcement of his name.

He addressed his conversation to Miss Keeldar.

“I went to the barracks,” he said, “and had an interview with Colonel Ryde: he approved my plans, and promised the aid I wanted: indeed, he offered a more numerous force than I require—half a dozen will suffice. I don’t intend to be swamped by red-coats: they are needed for appearance rather than anything else; my main reliance is on my own civilians.”

“And on their captain,” interposed Shirley.

“What, Captain Keeldar?” inquired Moore, slightly smiling, and not lifting his eyes: the tone of

raillery in which he said this was very respectful and suppressed.

“No,” returned Shirley, answering the smile; “Captain Gérard Moore, who trusts much to the prowess of his own right arm, I believe.”

“Furnished with his counting-house ruler,” added Moore. Resuming his usual gravity, he went on: “I received by this evening’s post a note from the Home-Secretary in answer to mine: it appears they are uneasy at the state of matters here in the north; they especially condemn the supineness and pusillanimity of the mill-owners; they say, as I have always said, that inaction, under present circumstances, is criminal, and that cowardice is cruelty, since both can only encourage disorder, and lead finally to sanguinary outbreaks. There is the note: I brought it for your perusal; and there is a batch of newspapers, containing further accounts of proceedings in Nottingham, Manchester, and elsewhere.”

He produced letters and journals, and laid them before Miss Keeldar. While she perused them, he took his tea quietly; but, though his tongue was still, his observant faculties seemed by no means off duty. Mrs. Pryor, sitting in the background, did not come within the range of his glance, but the two younger ladies had the full benefit thereof.

Miss Keeldar, placed directly opposite, was seen without effort: she was the object his eyes, when lifted, naturally met first; and, as what remained of daylight—the gilding of the west—was upon her, her

shape rose in relief from the dark panelling behind. Shirley's clear cheek was tinted yet with the colour which had risen into it a few minutes since: the dark lashes of her eyes looking down as she read, the dusk yet delicate line of her eyebrows, the almost sable gloss of her curls, made her heightened complexion look fine as the bloom of a red wild-flower, by contrast. There was natural grace in her attitude, and there was artistic effect in the ample and shining folds of her silk dress—an attire simply fashioned, but almost splendid from the shifting brightness of its dye, warp and woof being of tints deep and changing as the hue on a pheasant's neck. A glancing bracelet on her arm produced the contrast of gold and ivory: there was something brilliant in the whole picture. It is to be supposed that Moore thought so, as his eye dwelt long on it, but he seldom permitted his feelings or his opinions to exhibit themselves in his face: his temperament boasted a certain amount of phlegm, and he preferred an undemonstrative, not ungentle, but serious aspect, to any other.

He could not, by looking straight before him, see Caroline, as she was close at his side; it was necessary, therefore, to manœuvre a little to get her well within the range of his observation: he leaned back in his chair, and looked down on her. In Miss Helstone, neither he nor any one else could discover brilliancy. Sitting in the shade, without flowers or ornaments, her attire the modest muslin dress, colourless but for its narrow stripe of pale azure, her

complexion unflushed, unexcited, the very brownness of her hair and eyes invisible by this faint light, she was, compared with the heiress, as a graceful pencil-sketch compared with a vivid painting. Since Robert had seen her last, a great change had been wrought in her; whether he perceived it, might not be ascertained: he said nothing to that effect.

“How is Hortense?” asked Caroline, softly.

“Very well; but she complains of being unemployed: she misses you.”

“Tell her that I miss her, and that I write and read a portion of French every day.”

“She will ask if you sent your love: she is always particular on that point. You know she likes attention.”

“My best love—my very best; and say to her, that whenever she has time to write me a little note, I shall be glad to hear from her.”

“What if I forget? I am not the surest messenger of compliments.”

“No, don’t forget, Robert: it is no compliment—it is in good earnest.”

“And must therefore be delivered punctually?”

“If you please.”

“Hortense will be ready to shed tears. She is tender-hearted on the subject of her pupil; yet she reproaches you sometimes for obeying your uncle’s injunctions too literally. Affection, like love, will be unjust now and then.”

And Caroline made no answer to this observation;

for indeed her heart was troubled, and to her eyes she would have raised her handkerchief, if she had dared. If she had dared, too, she would have declared how the very flowers in the garden of Hollow's cottage were dear to her; how the little parlour of that house was her earthly paradise; how she longed to return to it, as much almost as the First Woman, in her exile, must have longed to revisit Eden. Not daring, however, to say these things, she held her peace: she sat quiet at Robert's side, waiting for him to say something more. It was long since this proximity had been hers—long since his voice had addressed her: could she, with any shew of probability, even of possibility, have imagined that the meeting gave him pleasure, to her it would have given deep bliss. Yet, even in doubt that it pleased—in dread that it might annoy him—she received the boon of the meeting as an imprisoned bird would the admission of sunshine to its cage: it was of no use arguing—contending against the sense of present happiness: to be near Robert was to be revived.

Miss Keeldar laid down the papers.

“And are you glad or sad for all these menacing tidings?” she inquired of her tenant.

“Not precisely either; but I certainly am instructed. I see that our only plan is to be firm. I see that efficient preparation and a resolute attitude are the best means of averting bloodshed.”

He then inquired if she had observed some par-

ticular paragraph, to which she replied in the negative, and he rose to show it to her: he continued the conversation standing before her. From the tenor of what he said, it appeared evident that they both apprehended disturbances in the neighbourhood of Briarfield, though in what form they expected them to break out was not specified. Neither Caroline nor Mrs. Pryor asked questions: the subject did not appear to be regarded as one ripe for free discussion; therefore the lady and her tenant were suffered to keep details to themselves, unimportuned by the curiosity of their listeners.

Miss Keeldar, in speaking to Mr. Moore, took a tone at once animated and dignified, confidential and self-respecting. When, however, the candles were brought in, and the fire was stirred up, and the fulness of light thus produced rendered the expression of her countenance legible, you could see that she was all interest, life, and earnestness: there was nothing coquettish in her demeanour: whatever she felt for Moore, she felt it seriously. And serious, too, were his feelings, and settled were his views, apparently; for he made no petty effort to attract, dazzle, or impress. He contrived, notwithstanding, to command a little; because the deeper voice, however mildly modulated, the somewhat harder mind, now and then, though involuntarily and unintentionally, bore down by some peremptory phrase or tone the mellow accents and susceptible, if high, nature of Shirley. Miss Keeldar looked happy in conversing

with him, and her joy seemed twofold,—a joy of the past and present, of memory and of hope.

What I have just said are Caroline's ideas of the pair: she felt what has just been described. In thus feeling, she tried not to suffer; but suffered sharply, nevertheless. She suffered, indeed, miserably: a few minutes before, her famished heart had tasted a drop and crumb of nourishment that, if freely given, would have brought back abundance of life where life was failing; but the generous feast was snatched from her, spread before another, and she remained but a bystander at the banquet.

The clock struck nine: it was Caroline's time for going home: she gathered up her work, put the embroidery, the scissors, the thimble into her bag: she bade Mrs. Pryor a quiet good-night, receiving from that lady a warmer pressure of the hand than usual: she stepped up to Miss Keeldar.

“Good-night, Shirley!”

Shirley started up. “What!—so soon? Are you going already?”

“It is past nine.”

“I never heard the clock. You will come again to-morrow; and you will be happy to-night, will you not? Remember our plans.”

“Yes,” said Caroline; “I have not forgotten.”

Her mind misgave her that neither those plans nor any other could permanently restore her mental tranquillity. She turned to Robert, who stood close behind her: as he looked up, the light of the candles on

the mantelpiece fell full on her face: all its paleness, all its change, all its forlorn meaning were clearly revealed. Robert had good eyes, and might have seen it, if he would: whether he did see it, nothing indicated.

“Good-night!” she said, shaking like a leaf, offering her thin hand hastily, anxious to part from him quickly.

“You are going home?” he asked, not touching her hand.

“Yes.”

“Is Fanny come for you?”

“Yes.”

“I may as well accompany you a step of the way: not up to the Rectory, though, lest my old friend, Helstone, should shoot me from the window.”

He laughed and took his hat. Caroline spoke of unnecessary trouble: he told her to put on her bonnet and shawl. She was quickly ready, and they were soon both in the open air. Moore drew her hand under his arm, just in his old manner,—that manner which she ever felt to be so kind.

“You may run on, Fanny,” he said to the housemaid; “we shall overtake you:” and when the girl had got a little in advance, he enclosed Caroline’s hand in his, and said he was glad to find she was a familiar guest at Fieldhead: he hoped her intimacy with Miss Keeldar would continue; such society would be both pleasant and improving.

Caroline replied that she liked Shirley.

“And there is no doubt the liking is mutual,” said Moore: “if she professes friendship, be certain she is sincere: she cannot feign; she scorns hypocrisy. And, Caroline, are we never to see you at Hollow’s cottage again?”

“I suppose not, unless my uncle should change his mind.”

“Are you much alone now?”

“Yes, a good deal. I have little pleasure in any society but Miss Keeldar’s.”

“Have you been quite well lately?”

“Quite.”

“You must take care of yourself. Be sure not to neglect exercise. Do you know I fancied you somewhat altered;—a little fallen away, and pale. Is your uncle kind to you?”

“Yes; he is just as he always is.”

“Not too tender, that is to say; not too protective and attentive. And what ails you, then?—tell me, Lina.”

“Nothing, Robert;” but her voice faltered.

“That is to say, nothing that you will tell me: I am not to be taken into confidence. Separation is then quite to estrange us, is it?”

“I do not know: sometimes I almost fear it is.”

“But it ought not to have that effect. ‘Should old acquaintance be forgot, and days of lang syne?’”

“Robert, I don’t forget.”

“It is two months, I should think, Caroline, since you were at the cottage.”

“ Since I was *within* it—yes.”

“ Have you ever passed that way in your walk ?”

“ I have come to the top of the fields sometimes of an evening, and looked down. Once I saw Hortense in the garden watering her flowers, and I know at what time you light your lamp in the counting-house: I have waited for it to shine out now and then; and I have seen you bend between it and the window: I knew it was you—I could almost trace the outline of your form.”

“ I wonder I never encountered you: I occasionally walk to the top of the Hollow’s fields after sunset.”

“ I know you do: I had almost spoken to you one night, you passed so near me.”

“ Did I? I passed near you, and did not see you! Was I alone?”

“ I saw you twice, and neither time were you alone.”

“ Who was my companion? Probably nothing but Joe Scott, or my own shadow by moonlight.”

“ No; neither Joe Scott nor your shadow, Robert. The first time you were with Mr. Yorke; and the second time, what you call your shadow was a shape with a white forehead and dark curls, and a sparkling necklace round its neck; but I only just got a glimpse of you and that fairy shadow: I did not wait to hear you converse.”

“ It appears you walk invisible. I noticed a ring

on your hand this evening; can it be the ring of Gyges? Henceforth, when sitting in the counting-house by myself, perhaps at dead of night, I shall permit myself to imagine that Caroline may be leaning over my shoulder reading with me from the same book, or sitting at my side engaged in her own particular task, and now and then raising her unseen eyes to my face to read there my thoughts."

"You need fear no such infliction: I do not come near you: I only stand afar off, watching what may become of you."

"When I walk out along the hedgerows in the evening after the mill is shut—or at night, when I take the watchman's place—I shall fancy the flutter of every little bird over its nest, the rustle of every leaf, a movement made by you; tree-shadows will take your shape; in the white sprays of hawthorn, I shall imagine glimpses of you. Lina, you will haunt me."

"I will never be where you would not wish me to be, nor see nor hear what you would wish unseen and unheard."

"I shall see you in my very mill in broad daylight: indeed, I have seen you there once. But a week ago, I was standing at the top of one of my long rooms, girls were working at the other end, and amongst half a dozen of them, moving to and fro, I seemed to see a figure resembling yours. It was some effect of doubtful light or shade, or of dazzling sunbeam. I walked up to this group; what I sought

had glided away : I found myself between two buxom lasses in pinafores."

"I shall not follow you into your mill, Robert, unless you call me there."

"Nor is that the only occasion on which imagination has played me a trick. One night, when I came home late from market, I walked into the cottage parlour thinking to find Hortense; but instead of her, I thought I found you. There was no candle in the room : my sister had taken the light up-stairs with her; the window-blind was not drawn, and broad moonbeams poured through the panes: there you were, Lina, at the casement, shrinking a little to one side in an attitude not unusual with you. You were dressed in white, as I have seen you dressed at an evening party. For half a second, your fresh, living face seemed turned towards me, looking at me; for half a second, my idea was to go and take your hand, to chide you for your long absence, and welcome your present visit. Two steps forward broke the spell: the drapery of the dress changed outline; the tints of the complexion dissolved, and were formless: positively, as I reached the spot, there was nothing left but the sweep of a white muslin curtain, and a balsam plant in a flower-pot, covered with a flush of bloom—'sic transit,' et cetera."

"It was not my wraith, then? I almost thought it was."

"No: only gauze, crockery, and pink blossom; a sample of earthly illusions."

“ I wonder you have time for such illusions, occupied as your mind must be.”

“ So do I. But I find in myself, Lina, two natures; one for the world and business, and one for home and leisure. Gérard Moore is a hard dog, brought up to mill and market: the person you call your cousin Robert is sometimes a dreamer, who lives elsewhere than in Cloth-hall and counting-house.”

“ Your two natures agree with you: I think you are looking in good spirits and health: you have quite lost that harassed air which it often pained one to see in your face a few months ago.”

“ Do you observe that? Certainly, I am disentangled of some difficulties: I have got clear of some shoals, and have more sea-room.”

“ And, with a fair wind, you may now hope to make a prosperous voyage?”

“ I may *hope* it—yes—but hope is deceptive: there is no controlling wind or wave: gusts and swells perpetually trouble the mariner’s course; he dare not dismiss from his mind the expectation of tempest.”

“ But you are ready for a breeze—you are a good seaman—an able commander: you are a skilful pilot, Robert; you will weather the storm.”

“ My kinswoman always thinks the best of me, but I will take her words for a propitious omen: I will consider that in meeting her to-night, I have

met one of those birds whose appearance is to the sailor the harbinger of good-luck."

"A poor harbinger of good-luck is she who can do nothing—who has no power. I feel my incapacity: it is of no use saying I have the will to serve you, when I cannot prove it; yet I have that will. I wish you success; I wish you high fortune and true happiness."

"When did you ever wish me anything else? What is Fanny waiting for—I told her to walk on? Oh! we have reached the churchyard; then, we are to part here, I suppose: we might have sat a few minutes in the church-porch, if the girl had not been with us. It is so fine a night, so summer-mild and still, I have no particular wish to return yet to the Hollow."

"But we cannot sit in the porch now, Robert."

Caroline said this because Moore was turning her round towards it.

"Perhaps not, but tell Fanny to go in; say we are coming: a few minutes will make no difference."

The church-clock struck ten.

"My uncle will be coming out to take his usual sentinel round, and he always surveys the church and churchyard."

"And if he does? If it were not for Fanny who knows we are here, I should find pleasure in dodging and eluding him. We could be under the east window when he is at the porch, as he came round to the north side, we could wheel off to the south;

we might at a pinch hide behind some of the monuments : that tall erection of the Wynnes would screen us completely."

"Robert, what good spirits you have ! Go—go!" added Caroline hastily, "I hear the front door——"

"I don't want to go ; on the contrary, I want to stay."

"You know my uncle will be terribly angry : he forbade me to see you because you are a Jacobin."

"A queer Jacobin !"

"Go, Robert, he is coming ; I hear him cough."

"Diable ! It is strange—what a pertinacious wish I feel to stay !"

"You remember what he did to Fanny's——" began Caroline, and stopped abruptly short. Sweetheart was the word that ought to have followed, but she could not utter it ; it seemed calculated to suggest ideas she had no intention to suggest : ideas delusive and disturbing. Moore was less scrupulous ; "Fanny's sweetheart ?" he said at once. "He gave him a shower-bath under the pump—did he not ? He'd do as much for me, I daresay, with pleasure. I should like to provoke the old Turk—not however against *you* : but he would make a distinction between a cousin and a lover, would he not ?"

"Oh ! he would not think of you in that way, of course not, his quarrel with you is entirely political ; yet I should not like the breach to be widened, and he is so testy. Here he is at the garden-gate—for your own sake and mine, Robert, go !"

The beseeching words were aided by a beseeching gesture and a more beseeching look. Moore covered her clasped hands an instant with his, answered her upward by a downward gaze, said "Good-night!" and went.

Caroline was in a moment at the kitchen-door behind Fanny; the shadow of the shovel-hat at that very instant fell on a moonlit tomb; the Rector emerged, erect as a cane, from his garden, and proceeded in slow march, his hands behind him, down the cemetery. Moore was almost caught: he had to "dodge" after all, to coast round the church, and finally to bend his tall form behind the Wynnes' ambitious monument. There he was forced to hide full ten minutes, kneeling with one knee on the turf, his hat off, his curls bare to the dew, his dark eyes shining, and his lips parted with inward laughter at his position; for the Rector meantime stood coolly star-gazing, and taking snuff within three feet of him.

It happened, however, that Mr. Helstone had no suspicion whatever on his mind; for being usually but vaguely informed of his niece's movements, not thinking it worth while to follow them closely, he was not aware that she had been out at all that day, and imagined her then occupied with book or work in her chamber: where, indeed, she was by this time; though not absorbed in the tranquil employment he ascribed to her, but standing at her window with fast-throbbing heart, peeping anxiously from behind

the blind, watching for her uncle to re-enter and her cousin to escape; and at last she was gratified: she heard Mr. Helstone come in, she saw Robert stride the tombs and vault the wall; she then went down to prayers. When she returned to her chamber, it was to meet the memory of Robert. Slumber's visitation was long averted: long she sat at her lattice, long gazed down on the old garden and older church, on the tombs laid out all gray and calm, and clear in moonlight. She followed the steps of the night, on its pathway of stars, far into the "wee sma' hours ayont the twal':" she was with Moore, in spirit, the whole time: she was at his side: she heard his voice: she gave her hand into his hand, it rested warm in his fingers. When the church-clock struck, when any other sound stirred, when a little mouse familiar to her chamber, an intruder for which she would never permit Fanny to lay a trap, came rattling amongst the links of her locket-chain, her one ring, and another trinket or two, on the toilette-table, to nibble a bit of biscuit laid ready for it, she looked up, recalled momentarily to the real. Then she said half aloud, as if deprecating the accusation of some unseen and unheard monitor,—

"I am not cherishing love-dreams: I am only thinking because I cannot sleep: of course, I know he will marry Shirley."

With returning silence, with the lull of the chime, and the retreat of her small untamed and unknown protégé, she still resumed the dream, nestling to the

vision's side,—listening to, conversing with it. It paled at last: as dawn approached, the setting stars and breaking day dimmed the creation of Fancy: the wakened song of birds hushed her whispers. The tale full of fire, quick with interest, borne away by the morning wind, became a vague murmur. The shape that, seen in a moonbeam, lived, had a pulse, had movement, wore health's glow and youth's freshness, turned cold and ghostly gray, confronted with the red of sunrise. It wasted. She was left solitary at last: she crept to her couch, chill and dejected.

CHAPTER III.

SHIRLEY SEEKS TO BE SAVED BY WORKS.

“OF course, I know he will marry Shirley,” were her first words when she rose in the morning. “And he ought to marry her: she can help him,” she added firmly. “But I shall be forgotten when they *are* married,” was the cruel succeeding thought. “Oh! I shall be wholly forgotten! And what—*what* shall I do when Robert is taken quite from me? Where shall I turn? *My* Robert! I wish I could justly call him mine: but I am poverty and incapacity; Shirley is wealth and power: and she is beauty too, and love—I cannot deny it. This is no sordid suit: she loves him—not with inferior feelings: she loves, or *will* love, as he must feel proud to be loved. Not a valid objection can be made. Let them be married then: but afterwards I shall be nothing to him. As for being his sister and all that stuff, I despise it. I will either be all or nothing to a man like Robert: no feeble shuffling, or false cant is endurable. Once let that pair be united, and I will

certainly leave them. As for lingering about, playing the hypocrite, and pretending to calm sentiments of friendship, when my soul will be wrung with other feelings, I shall not descend to such degradation. As little could I fill the place of their mutual friend as that of their deadly foe: as little could I stand between them as trample over them. Robert is a first-rate man—in my eyes: I *have* loved, *do* love, and *must* love him. I would be his wife, if I could; as I cannot, I must go where I shall never see him. There is but one alternative—to cleave to him as if I were a part of him, or to be sundered from him wide as the two poles of a sphere. Sunder me then, Providence. Part us speedily.”

Some such aspirations as these were again working in her mind late in the afternoon, when the apparition of one of the personages haunting her thoughts passed the parlour window. Miss Keeldar sauntered slowly by: her gait, her countenance wearing that mixture of wistfulness and carelessness which, when quiescent, was the wonted cast of her look, and character of her bearing. When animated, the carelessness quite vanished, the wistfulness became blent with a genial gaiety, seasoning the laugh, the smile, the glance, with an unique flavour of sentiment, so that mirth from her never resembled “the crackling of thorns under a pot.”

“What do you mean by not coming to see me this afternoon, as you promised?” was her address to Caroline as she entered the room.

“I was not in the humour,” replied Miss Helstone, very truly.

Shirley had already fixed on her a penetrating eye.

“No,” she said; “I see you are not in the humour for loving me: you are in one of your sunless, inclement moods, when one feels a fellow-creature’s presence is not welcome to you. You have such moods: are you aware of it?”

“Do you mean to stay long, Shirley?”

“Yes: I am come to have my tea, and must have it before I go. I shall take the liberty then of removing my bonnet, without being asked.”

And this she did, and then stood on the rug with her hands behind her.

“A pretty expression you have in your countenance,” she went on, still gazing keenly, though not inimically, rather indeed pityingly at Caroline. “Wonderfully self-supported you look, you solitude-seeking, wounded deer. Are you afraid Shirley will worry you, if she discovers that you are hurt, and that you bleed?”

“I never do fear Shirley.”

“But sometimes you dislike her: often you avoid her. Shirley can feel when she is slighted and shunned. If you had not walked home in the company you did last night, you would have been a different girl to-day. What time did you reach the Rectory?”

“By ten.”

“Humph! You took three-quarters of an hour

to walk a mile. Was it you, or Moore, who lingered so?"

"Shirley, you talk nonsense."

"*He* talked nonsense—that I doubt not; or he looked it, which is a thousand times worse: I see the reflection of his eyes on your forehead at this moment. I feel disposed to call him out, if I could only get a trustworthy second: I feel desperately irritated: I felt so last night, and have felt it all day.

"You don't ask me why," she proceeded, after a pause, "you little, silent, over-modest thing; and you don't deserve that I should pour out my secrets into your lap without an invitation. Upon my word, I could have found it in my heart to have dogged Moore yesterday evening with dire intent: I have pistols, and can use them."

"Stuff, Shirley! Which would you have shot—me or Robert?"

"Neither, perhaps—perhaps myself—more likely a bat or a tree-bough. He is a puppy—your cousin: a quiet, serious, sensible, judicious, ambitious puppy. I see him standing before me, talking his half-stern, half-gentle talk, bearing me down (as I am very conscious he does) with his fixity of purpose, &c.; and then—I have no patience with him!"

Miss Keeldar started off on a rapid walk through the room, repeating energetically that she had no patience with men in general, and with her tenant in particular.

“You are mistaken,” urged Caroline, in some anxiety: “Robert is no puppy or male flirt; I can vouch for that.”

“*You* vouch for it! Do you think I’ll take your word on the subject? There is no one’s testimony I would not credit sooner than yours. To advance Moore’s fortune, you would cut off your right hand.”

“But not tell lies; and if I speak the truth, I must assure you that he was just civil to me last night—that was all.”

“I never asked what he was—I can guess: I saw him from the window take your hand in his long fingers, just as he went out at my gate.”

“That is nothing. I am not a stranger, you know: I am an old acquaintance, and his cousin.”

“I feel indignant; and that is the long and short of the matter,” responded Miss Keeidar. “All my comfort,” she added, presently, “is broken up by his manœuvres. He keeps intruding between you and me: without him we should be good friends; but that six feet of puppyhood makes a perpetually recurring eclipse of our friendship. Again and again he crosses and obscures the disk I want always to see clear: ever and anon he renders me to you a mere bore and nuisance.”

“No, Shirley; no.”

“He does. You did not want my society this afternoon, and I feel it hard: you are naturally somewhat reserved, but I am a social personage, who cannot live alone. If we were but left unmolested, I

have that regard for you that I could bear you in my presence for ever, and not for the fraction of a second do I ever wish to be rid of you. You cannot say as much respecting me."

"Shirley, I can say anything you wish: Shirley, I like you."

"You will wish me at Jericho to-morrow, Lina."

"I shall not. I am every day growing more accustomed to—fonder of you. You know I am too English to get up a vehement friendship all at once; but you are so much better than common—you are so different to everyday young ladies—I esteem you—I value you: you are never a burden to me—never. Do you believe what I say?"

"Partly," replied Miss Keeldar, smiling rather incredulously; "but you are a peculiar personage: quiet as you look, there is both a force and a depth somewhere within, not easily reached or appreciated: then you certainly are not happy."

"And unhappy people are rarely good—is that what you mean?"

"Not at all: I mean rather that unhappy people are often preoccupied, and not in the mood for discoursing with companions of my nature. Moreover, there is a sort of unhappiness which [not only depresses, but corrodes—and that, I fear, is your portion. Will pity do you any good, Lina? If it will, take some from Shirley: she offers largely, and warrants the article genuine."

"Shirley, I never had a sister—you never had a

sister ; but it flashes on me at this moment how sisters feel towards each other. Affection twined with their life, which no shocks of feeling can uproot, which little quarrels only trample an instant that it may spring more freshly when the pressure is removed ; affection that no passion can ultimately outrival, with which even love itself cannot do more than compete in force and truth. Love hurts us so, Shirley : it is so tormenting, so racking, and it burns away our strength with its flame ; in affection is no pain and no fire, only sustenance and balm. I am supported and soothed when you—that is, *you only*—are near, Shirley. Do you believe me now ?”

“I am always easy of belief when the creed pleases me. We really are friends then, Lina, in spite of the black eclipse ?”

“We really are,” returned the other, drawing Shirley towards her, and making her sit down, “chance what may.”

“Come, then, we will talk of something else than the Troubler.” But at this moment the Rector came in, and the “something else” of which Miss Keeldar was about to talk was not again alluded to till the moment of her departure ; she then delayed a few minutes in the passage to say—

“Caroline, I wish to tell you that I have a great weight on my mind : my conscience is quite uneasy, as if I had committed, or was going to commit, a crime. It is not my *private* conscience, you must understand, but my landed-proprietor and lord-of-the-

manor conscience. I have got into the clutch of an eagle with iron talons. I have fallen under a stern influence, which I scarcely approve, but cannot resist. Something will be done ere long, I fear, which it by no means pleases me to think of. To ease my mind, and to prevent harm as far as I can, I mean to enter on a series of good works. Don't be surprised, therefore, if you see me all at once turn outrageously charitable. I have no idea how to begin, but you must give me some advice: we will talk more on the subject to-morrow; and just ask that excellent person, Miss Ainley, to step up to Fieldhead: I have some notion of putting myself under her tuition—won't she have a precious pupil? Drop a hint to her, Lina, that, though a well-meaning, I am rather a neglected character, and then she will feel less scandalized at my ignorance about clothing societies, and such things."

On the morrow, Caroline found Shirley sitting gravely at her desk, with an account-book, a bundle of bank-notes, and a well-filled purse before her. She was looking mighty serious, but a little puzzled. She said she had been "casting an eye" over the weekly expenditure in housekeeping at the Hall, trying to find out where she could retrench; that she had also just given audience to Mrs. Gill, the cook, and had sent that person away with a notion that her (Shirley's) brain was certainly crazed. "I have lectured her on the duty of being careful," said she, "in a way quite new to her. So eloquent was I on

the text of economy, that I surprised myself; for, you see, it is altogether a fresh idea: I never thought, much less spoke, on the subject till lately. But it is all theory; for when I came to the practical part I could retrench nothing. I had not firmness to take off a single pound of butter, or to prosecute to any clear result an inquest into the destiny of either dripping, lard, bread, cold meat, or other kitchen perquisite whatever. I know we never get up illuminations at Fieldhead, but I could not ask the meaning of sundry quite unaccountable pounds of candles: we do not wash for the parish, yet I viewed in silence items of soap and bleaching powder calculated to satisfy the solicitude of the most anxious inquirer after our position in reference to those articles: carnivorous I am not, nor is Mrs. Pryor, nor is Mrs. Gill herself, yet I only hemmed and opened my eyes a little wide when I saw butcher's bills whose figure seemed to prove that fact—falsehood, I mean. Caroline, you may laugh at me, but you can't change me. I am a poltroon on certain points—I feel it. There is a base alloy of moral cowardice in my composition. I blushed and hung my head before Mrs. Gill, when she ought to have been faltering confessions to me. I found it impossible to get up the spirit even to hint, much less to prove, to her that she was a cheat. I have no calm dignity—no true courage about me.”

“Shirley, what fit of self-injustice is this? My uncle, who is not given to speak well of women, says

there are not ten thousand men in England as genuinely fearless as you."

"I am fearless, physically: I am never nervous about danger. I was not startled from self-possession when Mr. Wynne's great red bull rose with a bellow before my face, as I was crossing the cowslip-lea alone, stooped his begrimed, sullen head, and made a run at me; but I was afraid of seeing Mrs. Gill brought to shame and confusion of face. You have twice—ten times my strength of mind on certain subjects, Caroline: you, whom no persuasions can induce to pass a bull, however quiet he looks, would have firmly shown my housekeeper she had done wrong; then you would have gently and wisely admonished her; and at last, I daresay, provided she had seemed penitent, you would have very sweetly forgiven her. Of this conduct I am incapable. However, in spite of exaggerated imposition, I still find we live within our means: I have money in hand, and I really must do some good with it. The Briarfield poor are badly off: they must be helped. What ought I to do, think you, Lina? Had I not better distribute the cash at once?"

"No, indeed, Shirley; you will not manage properly. I have often noticed that your only notion of charity is to give shillings and half-crowns in a careless, freehanded sort of way, which is liable to continual abuse. You must have a prime minister, or you will get yourself into a series of scrapes. You suggested Miss Ainley yourself: to Miss Ainley

I will apply ; and, meantime, promise to keep quiet, and not begin throwing away your money. What a great deal you have, Shirley!—you must feel very rich with all that?”

“Yes ; I feel of consequence. It is not an immense sum, but I feel responsible for its disposal ; and really this responsibility weighs on my mind more heavily than I could have expected. They say that there are some families almost starving to death in Briarfield : some of my own cottagers are in wretched circumstances : I must and will help them.”

“Some people say we shouldn't give alms to the poor, Shirley.”

“They are great fools for their pains. For those who are not hungry, it is easy to palaver about the degradation of charity, and so on ; but they forget the brevity of life, as well as its bitterness. We have none of us long to live : let us help each other through seasons of want and woe, as well as we can, without heeding in the least the scruples of vain philosophy.”

“But you do help others, Shirley : you give a great deal as it is.”

“Not enough : I must give more, or, I tell you, my brother's blood will some day be crying to Heaven against me. For, after all, if political incendiaries come here to kindle conflagration in the neighbourhood, and my property is attacked, I shall defend it like a tigress—I know I shall. Let me listen to Mercy as long as she is near me : her voice once

drowned by the shout of ruffian defiance, and I shall be full of impulses to resist and quell. If once the poor gather and rise in the form of the mob, I shall turn against them as aristocrat: if they bully me, I must defy; if they attack, I must resist,—and I will.”

“You talk like Robert.”

“I feel like Robert, only more fierily. Let them meddle with Robert, or Robert’s mill, or Robert’s interests, and I shall hate them. At present I am no patrician, nor do I regard the poor round me as plebeians; but if once they violently wrong me or mine, and then presume to dictate to us, I shall quite forget pity for their wretchedness and respect for their poverty, in scorn of their ignorance and wrath at their insolence.”

“Shirley—how your eyes flash!”

“Because my soul burns. Would you, any more than me, let Robert be borne down by numbers?”

“If I had your power to aid Robert, I would use it as you mean to use it. If I could be such a friend to him as you can be, I would stand by him as you mean to stand by him—till death.”

“And now, Lina, though your eyes don’t flash, they glow. You drop your lids; but I saw a kindled spark. However, it is not yet come to fighting. What I want to do is to *prevent* mischief. I cannot forget, either day or night, that these embittered feelings of the poor against the rich have been generated in suffering: they would

neither hate nor envy us if they did not deem us so much happier than themselves. To allay this suffering, and thereby lessen this hate, let me, out of my abundance, give abundantly; and that the donation may go farther, let it be made wisely. To that intent, we must introduce some clear, calm, practical sense into our councils: so go, and fetch Miss Ainley."

Without another word, Caroline put on her bonnet and departed. It may, perhaps, appear strange that neither she nor Shirley thought of consulting Mrs. Pryor on their scheme; but they were wise in abstaining. To have consulted her—and this they knew by instinct—would only have been to involve her in painful embarrassment. She was far better informed, better read, a deeper thinker than Miss Ainley, but of administrative energy, of executive activity, she had none. She would subscribe her own modest mite to a charitable object willingly, secret almsgiving suited her; but in public plans, on a large scale, she could take no part: as to originating them, that was out of the question. This Shirley knew, and therefore she did not trouble Mrs. Pryor by unavailing conferences, which could only remind her of her own deficiencies, and do no good.

It was a bright day for Miss Ainley, when she was summoned to Fieldhead to deliberate on projects so congenial to her; when she was seated with all honour and deference at a table with paper, pen,

ink and—what was best of all—cash before her, and requested to draw up a regular plan for administering relief to the destitute poor of Briarfield. She, who knew them all, had studied their wants, had again and again felt in what way they might best be succoured, could the means of succour only be found, was fully competent to the undertaking, and a meek exultation gladdened her kind heart as she felt herself able to answer clearly and promptly the eager questions put by the two young girls; as she showed them in her answers how much and what serviceable knowledge she had acquired of the condition of her fellow-creatures round her.

Shirley placed at her disposal 300*l.*, and at sight of the money Miss Ainley's eyes filled with joyful tears; for she already saw the hungry fed, the naked clothed, the sick comforted thereby. She quickly drew up a simple, sensible plan for its expenditure; and she assured them brighter times would now come round, for she doubted not the lady of Field-head's example would be followed by others: she should try to get additional subscriptions, and to form a fund; but first she must consult the clergy: yes, on that point, she was peremptory: Mr. Helstone, Dr. Boulton, Mr. Hall, *must* be consulted—(for not only must Briarfield be relieved, but Whinbury and Nunnely)—it would, she averred, be presumption in her to take a single step unauthorized by them.

The clergy were sacred beings in Miss Ainley's

eyes: no matter what might be the insignificance of the individual, his station made him holy. The very curates—who, in their trivial arrogance, were hardly worthy to tie her patten-strings, or carry her cotton umbrella, or check woollen-shawl—she, in her pure, sincere enthusiasm, looked upon as sucking saints. No matter how clearly their little vices and enormous absurdities were pointed out to her, she could not see them: she was blind to ecclesiastical defects: the white surplice covered a multitude of sins.

Shirley, knowing this harmless infatuation on the part of her recently chosen prime minister, stipulated expressly that the curates were to have no voice in the disposal of the money; that their meddling fingers were not to be inserted into the pie. The rectors, of course, must be paramount, and they might be trusted: they had some experience, some sagacity, and Mr. Hall, at least, had sympathy and loving-kindness for his fellow-men; but as for the youth under them, they must be set aside, kept down, and taught that subordination and silence best became their years and capacity.

It was with some horror Miss Ainley heard this language: Caroline, however, interposing with a mild word or two in praise of Mr. Sweeting, calmed her again. Sweeting was, indeed, her own favourite: she endeavoured to respect Messrs. Malone and Donne; but the slices of sponge-cake, and glasses of cow-slip or primrose wine, she had at different times

administered to Sweeting, when he came to see her in her little cottage, were ever offered with sentiments of truly motherly regard. The same innocuous collation she had once presented to Malone; but that personage evinced such open scorn of the offering, she had never ventured to renew it. To Donne she always served the treat, and was happy to see his approbation of it proved beyond a doubt, by the fact of his usually eating two pieces of cake, and putting a third in his pocket.

Indefatigable in her exertions where good was to be done, Miss Ainley would immediately have set out on a walk of ten miles round to the three rectors, in order to show her plan, and humbly solicit their approval; but Miss Keeldar interdicted this, and proposed, as an amendment, to collect the clergy in a small select reunion that evening at Fieldhead. Miss Ainley was to meet them, and the plan was to be discussed in full privy council.

Shirley managed to get the senior priesthood together accordingly; and before the old maid's arrival she had, further, talked all the gentlemen into the most charming mood imaginable. She herself had taken in hand Dr. Boulty and Mr. Helstone. The first was a stubborn old Welshman, hot, opinionated, and obstinate, but withal a man who did a great deal of good, though not without making some noise about it: the latter, we know. She had rather a friendly feeling for both; especially for old Helstone; and it cost her no trouble to be quite

delightful to them. She took them round the garden; she gathered them flowers; she was like a kind daughter to them. Mr. Hall she left to Caroline—or rather, it was to Caroline's care Mr. Hall consigned himself.

He generally sought Caroline in every party where she and he happened to be. He was not in general a lady's man, though all ladies liked him: something of a book-worm he was, near sighted, spectaclled, now and then abstracted. To old ladies he was kind as a son. To men of every occupation and grade he was acceptable: the truth, simplicity, frankness of his manners, the nobleness of his integrity, the reality and elevation of his piety, won him friends in every grade: his poor clerk and sexton delighted in him; the noble patron of his living esteemed him highly. It was only with young, handsome, fashionable, and stylish ladies he felt a little shy: being himself a plain man—plain in aspect, plain in manners, plain in speech—he seemed to fear their dash, elegance, and airs. But Miss Helstone had neither dash nor airs, and her native elegance was of a very quiet order—quiet as the beauty of a ground-loving hedge-flower. He was a fluent, cheerful, agreeable talker. Caroline could talk, too, in a *tête-à-tête*: she liked Mr. Hall to come and take the seat next her in a party, and thus secure her from Peter Augustus Malone, Joseph Donne, or John Sykes; and Mr. Hall never failed to avail himself of this privilege when he possibly

could. Such preference shewn by a single gentleman to a single lady would certainly, in ordinary cases, have set in motion the tongues of the gossips; but Cyril Hall was forty-five years old, slightly bald, and slightly gray, and nobody ever said or thought he was likely to be married to Miss Helstone. Nor did he think so himself: he was wedded already to his books and his parish: his kind sister Margaret, spectacled and learned like himself, made him happy in his single state; he considered it too late to change. Besides, he had known Caroline as a pretty little girl: she had sat on his knee many a time; he had bought her toys and given her books; he felt that her friendship for him was mixed with a sort of filial respect; he could not have brought himself to attempt to give another colour to her sentiments, and his serene mind could glass a fair image without feeling its depths troubled by the reflection.

When Miss Ainley arrived, she was made kindly welcome by every one: Mrs. Pryor and Margaret Hall made room for her on the sofa between them, and when the three were seated, they formed a trio which the gay and thoughtless would have scorned, indeed, as quite worthless and unattractive—a middle-aged widow and two plain spectacled old maids—yet which had its own quiet value, as many a suffering and friendless human being knew.

Shirley opened the business and showed the plan.

“I know the hand which drew up that,” said Mr.

Hall, glancing at Miss Ainley, and smiling benignantly: his approbation was won at once. Boulton heard and deliberated with bent brow and protruded under lip: his consent he considered too weighty to be given in a hurry. Helstone glanced sharply round with an alert, suspicious expression, as if he apprehended that female craft was at work, and that something in petticoats was somehow trying underhand to acquire too much influence, and make itself of too much importance. Shirley caught and comprehended the expression:—

“This scheme is nothing,” said she, carelessly; “it is only an outline—a mere suggestion: you, gentlemen, are requested to draw up rules of your own.”

And she directly fetched her writing-case, smiling queerly to herself as she bent over the table where it stood: she produced a sheet of paper, a new pen, drew an arm-chair to the table, and presenting her hand to old Helstone, begged permission to instal him in it. For a minute he was a little stiff, and stood wrinkling his copper-coloured forehead strangely. At last he muttered:—

“Well—you are neither my wife nor my daughter, so I’ll be led for once; but mind—I know I *am* led: your little female manœuvres don’t blind me.”

“Oh!” said Shirley, dipping the pen in the ink, and putting it into his hand, “you must regard me as Captain Keeldar to-day. This is quite a gentleman’s affair—yours and mine entirely, Doctor

(so she had dubbed the Rector). The ladies there are only to be our aides-de-camp, and at their peril they speak, till we have settled the whole business."

He smiled a little grimly, and began to write. He soon interrupted himself to ask questions, and consult his brethren, disdainfully lifting his glance over the curly heads of the two girls, and the demure caps of the elder ladies, to meet the winking glasses and gray pates of the priests. In the discussion which ensued, all three gentlemen, to their infinite credit, showed a thorough acquaintance with the poor of their parishes,—an even minute knowledge of their separate wants. Each Rector knew where clothing was needed, where food would be most acceptable, where money could be bestowed with a probability of it being judiciously laid out. Wherever their memories fell short, Miss Ainley or Miss Hall, if applied to, could help them out; but both ladies took care not to speak unless spoken to. Neither of them wanted to be foremost, but each sincerely desired to be useful, and useful the clergy consented to make them: with which boon they were content.

Shirley stood behind the Rectors, leaning over their shoulders now and then to glance at the rules drawn up, and the list of cases making out, listening to all they said, and still at intervals smiling her queer smile—a smile not ill-natured, but significant: too significant to be generally thought amiable. Men rarely like such of their fellows as read their inward nature too clearly and truly. It is good for women,

especially, to be endowed with a soft blindness: to have mild, dim eyes, that never penetrate below the surface of things—that take all for what it seems: thousands, knowing this, keep their eyelids drooped, on system; but the most downcast glance has its loophole, through which it can, on occasion, take its sentinel-survey of life. I remember once seeing a pair of blue eyes, that were usually thought sleepy, secretly on the alert, and I knew by their expression—an expression which chilled my blood, it was in that quarter so wondrously unexpected—that for years they had been accustomed to silent soul-reading. The world called the owner of these blue eyes “bonne petite femme” (she was not an Englishwoman): I learned her nature afterwards—got it off by heart—studied it in its farthest, most hidden recesses—she was the finest, deepest, subtlest schemer in Europe.

When all was at length settled to Miss Keeldar's mind, and the clergy had entered so fully into the spirit of her plans as to head the subscription-list with their signatures for 50*l.* each, she ordered supper to be served; having previously directed Mrs. Gill to exercise her utmost skill in the preparation of this repast. Mr. Hall was no bon-vivant: he was naturally an abstemious man, indifferent to luxury; but Boulton and Helstone both liked good cookery; the *recherché* supper consequently put them into excellent humour: they did justice to it, though in a gentlemanly way—not in the mode Mr. Donne would have done, had he been present. A glass of fine wine

was likewise tasted, with discerning though most decorous relish. Captain Keeldar was complimented on his taste; the compliment charmed him: it had been his aim to gratify and satisfy his priestly guests: he had succeeded, and was radiant with glee.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. DONNE'S EXODUS.

THE next day Shirley expressed to Caroline how delighted she felt that the little party had gone off so well.

“I rather like to entertain a circle of gentlemen,” said she: “it is amusing to observe how they enjoy a judiciously concocted repast. For ourselves, you see, these choice wines and these scientific dishes are of no importance to us; but gentlemen seem to retain something of the naïveté of children about food, and one likes to please them: that is, when they show the becoming, decent self-government of our admirable rectors. I watch Moore sometimes, to try and discover how he can be pleased but he has not that child's simplicity about him. Did you ever find out his accessible point, Caroline? You have seen more of him than I.”

“It is not, at any rate, that of my uncle and Dr. Boulby,” returned Caroline, smiling. She always felt a sort of shy pleasure in following Miss Keeldar's lead

respecting the discussion of her cousin's character: left to herself, she would never have touched on the subject; but when invited, the temptation of talking about him of whom she was ever thinking was irresistible. "But," she added, "I really don't know what it is; for I never watched Robert in my life but my scrutiny was presently baffled by finding he was watching me."

"There it is!" exclaimed Shirley: "you can't fix your eyes on him but his presently flash on you. He is never off his guard: he won't give you an advantage: even when he does not look at you, his thoughts seem to be busy amongst your own thoughts, tracing your words and actions to their source, contemplating your motives at his ease. Oh! I know that sort of character, or something in the same style: it is one that piques me singularly—how does it affect you?"

This question was a specimen of one of Shirley's sharp, sudden turns: Caroline used to be fluttered by them at first, but she had now got into the way of parrying these homethrusts like a little quakeress.

"Pique you? In what way does it pique you?" she said.

"Here he comes!" suddenly exclaimed Shirley, breaking off, starting up and running to the window. "Here comes a diversion. I never told you of a superb conquest I have made lately—made at those parties to which I can never persuade you to accompany me; and the thing has been done without effort or intention on my part: that I aver. There is the

bell—and, by all that's delicious! there are two of them. Do they never hunt, then, except in couples? You may have one, Lina, and you may take your choice: I hope I am generous enough. Listen to Tartar!"

The black-muzzled, tawny dog, a glimpse of which was seen in the chapter which first introduced its mistress to the reader, here gave tongue in the hall, amidst whose hollow space the deep bark resounded formidably. A growl, more terrible than the bark—menacing as muttered thunder—succeeded.

"Listen!" again cried Shirley, laughing. "You would think that the prelude to a bloody onslaught: they will be frightened: they don't know old Tartar as I do: they are not aware his uproars are all sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Some bustle was heard. "Down, sir!—down!" exclaimed a high-toned, imperious voice, and then came a crack of a cane or whip. Immediately there was a yell—a scutter—a run—a positive tumult.

"Oh! Malone! Malone!"

"Down! down! down!" cried the high voice.

"He really is worrying them!" exclaimed Shirley. "They have struck him: a blow is what he is not used to, and will not take."

Out she ran: a gentleman was fleeing up the oak staircase, making for refuge in the gallery or chambers in hot haste; another was backing fast to the stair-foot, wildly flourishing a knotty stick, at the same time reiterating, "Down! down! down!" while

the tawny dog bayed, bellowed, howled at him, and a group of servants came bundling from the kitchen. The dog made a spring; the second gentleman turned tail and rushed after his comrade: the first was already safe in a bed-room: he held the door against his fellow;—nothing so merciless as terror;—but the other fugitive struggled hard: the door was about to yield to his strength.

“Gentlemen,” was uttered in Miss Keeldar’s silvery but vibrating tones, “spare my locks, if you please. Calm yourselves!—come down! Look at Tartar,—he won’t harm a cat.”

She was caressing the said Tartar: he lay crouched at her feet, his fore-paws stretched out, his tail still in threatening agitation, his nostrils snorting, his bull-dog eyes conscious of a dull fire. He was an honest, phlegmatic, stupid, but stubborn canine character: he loved his mistress, and John—the man who fed him,—but was mostly indifferent to the rest of the world: quiet enough he was, unless struck or threatened with a stick, and that put a demon into him at once.

“Mr. Malone, how do you do?” continued Shirley, lifting up her mirth-lit face to the gallery. “That is not the way to the oak-parlour: that is Mrs. Pryor’s apartment. Request your friend Mr. Donne to evacuate: I shall have the greatest pleasure in receiving him in a lower room.”

“Ha! ha!” cried Malone, in hollow laughter, quitting the door, and leaning over the massive

balustrade. "Really that animal alarmed Donne. He is a little timid," he proceeded, stiffening himself, and walking trimly to the stair-head. "I thought it better to follow, in order to reassure him."

"It appears you did: well, come down, if you please. John" (turning to her man-servant), "go up-stairs and liberate Mr. Donne. Take care, Mr. Malone, the stairs are slippery."

In truth they were; being of polished oak. The caution came a little late for Malone: he had slipped already in his stately descent, and was only saved from falling by a clutch at the banisters, which made the whole structure creak again.

Tartar seemed to think the visitor's descent effected with unwarranted *éclat*, and accordingly he growled once more. Malone, however, was no coward: the spring of the dog had taken him by surprise; but he passed him now in suppressed fury rather than fear: if a look could have strangled Tartar, he would have breathed no more. Forgetting politeness, in his sullen rage, Malone pushed into the parlour before Miss Keeldar. He glanced at Miss Helstone; he could scarcely bring himself to bend to her. He glared on both the ladies: he looked as if, had either of them been his wife, he would have made a glorious husband at the moment: in each hand he seemed as if he would have liked to clutch one and gripe her to death.

However, Shirley took pity: she ceased to laugh; and Caroline was too true a lady to smile even at

any one under mortification. Tartar was dismissed; Peter Augustus was soothed; for Shirley had looks and tones that might soothe a very bull: he had sense to feel that, since he could not challenge the owner of the dog, he had better be civil; and civil he tried to be; and his attempts being well received, he grew presently *very* civil and quite himself again. He had come, indeed, for the express purpose of making himself charming and fascinating: rough portents had met him on his first admission to Fieldhead; but that passage got over, charming and fascinating he resolved to be. Like March, having come in like a lion, he purposed to go out like a lamb.

For the sake of air, as it appeared, or perhaps for that of ready exit in case of some new emergency arising, he took his seat—not on the sofa, where Miss Keeldar offered him enthronization, nor yet near the fireside, to which Caroline, by a friendly sign, gently invited him,—but on a chair close to the door. Being no longer sullen or furious, he grew, after his fashion, constrained and embarrassed. He talked to the ladies by fits and starts, choosing for topics whatever was most intensely commonplace: he sighed deeply, significantly, at the close of every sentence; he sighed in each pause; he sighed ere he opened his mouth. At last, finding it desirable to add ease to his other charms, he drew forth to aid him an ample silk pocket-handkerchief. This was to be the graceful toy with which his

unoccupied hands were to trifle. He went to work with a certain energy: he folded the red and yellow square cornerwise; he whipped it open with a waft: again he folded it in narrower compass: he made of it a handsome band. To what purpose would he proceed to apply the ligature? Would he wrap it about his throat—his head? Should it be a comforter or a turban? Neither. Peter Augustus had an inventive—an original genius: he was about to show the ladies graces of action possessing at least the charm of novelty. He sat on the chair with his athletic Irish legs crossed, and these legs, in that attitude, he circled with the bandana and bound firmly together. It was evident he felt this device to be worth an encore: he repeated it more than once. The second performance sent Shirley to the window to laugh her silent but irrepressible laugh unseen: it turned Caroline's head aside, that her long curls might screen the smile mantling on her features. Miss Helstone, indeed, was amused by more than one point in Peter's demeanour: she was edified at the complete though abrupt diversion of his homage from herself to the heiress: the 5,000% he supposed her likely one day to inherit, were not to be weighed in the balance against Miss Keeldar's estate and hall. He took no pains to conceal his calculations and tactics: he pretended to no gradual change of views; he wheeled about at once: the pursuit of the lesser fortune was openly relinquished for that of the greater. On what grounds he ex-

pected to succeed in his chase, himself best knew: certainly not by skilful management.

From the length of time that elapsed, it appeared that John had some difficulty in persuading Mr. Donne to descend. At length, however, that gentleman appeared: nor, as he presented himself at the oak-parlour door, did he seem in the slightest degree ashamed or confused—not a whit. Donne, indeed, was of that coldly phlegmatic, immoveably complacent, densely self-satisfied nature which is insensible to shame. He had never blushed in his life: no humiliation could abash him: his nerves were not capable of sensation enough to stir his life, and make colour mount to his cheek: he had no fire in his blood, and no modesty in his soul: he was a frontless, arrogant, decorous slip of the commonplace; conceited, inane, insipid: and this gentleman had a notion of wooing Miss Keeldar! He knew no more, however, how to set about the business than if he had been an image carved in wood: he had no idea of a taste to be pleased, a heart to be reached in courtship: his notion was, when he should have formally visited her a few times, to write a letter proposing marriage; then he calculated she would accept him for love of his office, then they would be married, then he should be master of Fieldhead, and he should live very comfortably, have servants at his command, eat and drink of the best, and be a great man. You would not have suspected his intentions when he ad-

dressed his intended bride in an impertinent injured tone:—

“A very dangerous dog that, Miss Keeldar. I wonder you should keep such an animal.”

“Do you, Mr. Donne? Perhaps you will wonder more when I tell you I am very fond of him.”

“I should say you are not serious in the assertion. Can't fancy a lady fond of that brute—'tis so ugly—a mere carter's dog—pray hang him.”

“Hang what I am fond of?”

“And purchase in his stead some sweetly pooty pug or poodle: something appropriate to the fair sex: ladies generally like lap-dogs.”

“Perhaps I am an exception.”

“Oh! you can't be, you know. All ladies are alike in those matters: that is universally allowed.”

“Tartar frightened you terribly, Mr. Donne. I hope you won't take any harm.”

“That I shall, no doubt. He gave me a turn I shall not soon forget. When I *sor* him (such was Mr. Donne's pronunciation) about to spring, I thought I should have fainted.”

“Perhaps you did faint in the bed-room—you were a long time there?”

“No; I bore up that I might hold the door fast: I was determined not to let any one enter: I thought I would keep a barrier between me and the enemy.”

“But what if your friend Mr. Malone had been worried?”

“Malone must take care of himself. Your man persuaded me to come out at last by saying the dog was chained up in his kennel: if I had not been assured of this, I would have remained all day in the chamber. But what is that? I declare the man has told a falsehood! The dog is there!”

And indeed Tartar walked past the glass-door opening to the garden, stiff, tawny, and black-muzzled as ever. He still seemed in bad humour: he was growling again, and whistling a half-strangled whistle, being an inheritance from the bull-dog side of his ancestry.

“There are other visitors coming,” observed Shirley, with that provoking coolness which the owners of formidable-looking dogs are apt to shew while their animals are all bristle and bay. Tartar sprang down the pavement towards the gate, bellowing “avec explosion.” His mistress quietly opened the glass-door, and stepped out chirruping to him. His bellow was already silenced, and he was lifting up his huge, blunt, stupid head to the new callers to be patted.

“What—Tartar, Tartar!” said a cheery, rather boyish voice: “don’t you know us? Good-morning, old boy!”

And little Mr. Sweeting, whose conscious good-nature made him comparatively fearless of man, woman, child, or brute, came through the gate, caressing the guardian. His Vicar, Mr. Hall, followed: he had no fear of Tartar either, and Tartar had no

ill-will to him: he snuffed both the gentlemen round, and then, as if concluding that they were harmless, and might be allowed to pass, he withdrew to the sunny front of the hall, leaving the archway free. Mr. Sweeting followed, and would have played with him, but Tartar took no notice of his caresses: it was only his mistress's hand whose touch gave him pleasure; to all others he shewed himself obstinately insensible.

Shirley advanced to meet Messrs. Hall and Sweeting, shaking hands with them cordially: they were come to tell her of certain successes they had achieved that morning in applications for subscriptions to the fund. Mr. Hall's eyes beamed benignantly through his spectacles: his plain face looked positively handsome with goodness, and when Caroline, seeing who was come, ran out to meet him, and put both her hands into his, he gazed down on her with a gentle, serene, affectionate expression, that gave him the aspect of a smiling Melancthon.

Instead of re-entering the house, they strayed through the garden, the ladies walking one on each side of Mr. Hall. It was a breezy sunny day; the air freshened the girl's cheeks, and gracefully dishevelled their ringlets: both of them looked pretty,—one, gay: Mr. Hall spoke oftenest to his brilliant companion, looked most frequently at the quiet one. Miss Keeldar gathered handfuls of the profusely blooming flowers, whose perfume filled the enclosure; she gave some to Caroline, telling her to choose a nosegay for Mr.

Hall; and with her lap filled with delicate and splendid blossoms, Caroline sat down on the steps of a summer-house: the Vicar stood near her, leaning on his cane.

Shirley, who could not be inhospitable, now called out the neglected pair in the oak-parlour: she convoyed Donne past his dread enemy Tartar, who, with his nose on his fore-paws, lay snoring under the meridian sun. Donne was not grateful: he never *was* grateful for kindness and attention; but he was glad of the safeguard. Miss Keeldar, desirous of being impartial, offered the curates flowers: they accepted them with native awkwardness. Malone seemed specially at a loss, when a bouquet filled one hand, while his shillelagh occupied the other. Donne's "Thank you!" was rich to hear: it was the most fatuous and arrogant of sounds, implying that he considered this offering an homage to his merits, and an attempt on the part of the heiress to ingratiate herself into his priceless affections. Sweeting alone received the poesy like a smart, sensible, little man, as he was; putting it gallantly and nattily into his button-hole.

As a reward for his good manners, Miss Keeldar beckoning him apart, gave him some commission, which made his eyes sparkle with glee. Away he flew, round by the court-yard to the kitchen: no need to give him directions; he was always at home everywhere. Ere long he re-appeared, carrying a round table, which he placed under the cedar; then

he collected six garden-chairs from various nooks and bowers in the grounds, and placed them in a circle. The parlour-maid—Miss Keeldar kept no footman—came out, bearing a napkin-covered tray. Sweeting's nimble fingers aided in disposing glasses, plates, knives and forks: he assisted her too in setting forth a neat luncheon, consisting of cold chicken, ham, and tarts.

This sort of impromptu regale, it was Shirley's delight to offer any chance guests; and nothing pleased her better than to have an alert, obliging little friend, like Sweeting, to run about her hand, cheerily receive and briskly execute her hospitable hints. David and she were on the best terms in the world; and his devotion to the heiress was quite disinterested, since it prejudiced in nothing his faithful allegiance to the magnificent Dora Sykes.

The repast turned out a very merry one. Donne and Malone, indeed, contributed but little to its vivacity, the chief part they played in it being what concerned the knife, fork, and wineglass; but where four such natures, as Mr. Hall, David Sweeting, Shirley, and Caroline, were assembled in health and amity, on a green lawn, under a sunny sky, amidst a wilderness of flowers, there could not be ungenial dulness.

In the course of conversation, Mr. Hall reminded the ladies that Whitsuntide was approaching, when the grand United Sunday-School tea-drinking and procession of the three parishes of Briarfield, Whin-

bury, and Nunnely were to take place. Caroline he knew would be at her post as teacher, he said, and he hoped Miss Keeldar would not be wanting: he hoped she would make her first public appearance amongst them at that time. Shirley was not the person to miss an occasion of this sort: she liked festive excitement, a gathering of happiness, a concentration and combination of pleasant details, a throng of glad faces, a muster of elated hearts: she told Mr. Hall they might count on her with security: she did not know what she would have to do, but they might dispose of her as they pleased.

“And,” said Caroline, “you will promise to come to my table, and to sit near me, Mr. Hall?”

“I shall not fail, Deo volente,” said he. “I have occupied the place on her right hand at these monster tea-drinkings for the last six years,” he proceeded, turning to Miss Keeldar. “They made her a Sunday-school teacher when she was a little girl of twelve: she is not particularly self-confident by nature, as you may have observed; and the first time she had to ‘take a tray,’ as the phrase is, and make tea in public, there was some piteous trembling and flushing. I observed the speechless panic, the cups shaking in the little hand, and the overflowing teapot filled too full from the urn. I came to her aid, took a seat near her, managed the urn and the slop-basin, and in fact made the tea for her like any old woman.”

“I was very grateful to you,” interposed Caroline.

“You were: you told me so with an earnest sincerity that repaid me well; inasmuch as it was not like the majority of little ladies of twelve, whom you may help and caress for ever without their evincing any quicker sense of the kindness done and meant than if they were made of wax and wood, instead of flesh and nerves. She kept close to me, Miss Keeldar, the rest of the evening, walking with me over the grounds where the children were playing; she followed me into the vestry when all were summoned into church: she would, I believe, have mounted with me to the pulpit, had I not taken the previous precaution of conducting her to the Rectory-pew.”

“And he has been my friend ever since,” said Caroline.

“And always sat at her table, near her tray, and handed the cups,—that is the extent of my services. The next thing I do for her will be to marry her some day to some curate or mill-owner: but mind, Caroline, I shall inquire about the bridegroom’s character, and if he is not a gentleman likely to render happy the little girl who walked with me hand in hand over Nunnely Common, I will not officiate: so take care.”

“The caution is useless: I am not going to be married. I shall live single like your sister Margaret, Mr. Hall.”

“Very well—you might do worse—Margaret is not unhappy: she ha her books for a pleasure, and

her brother for a care, and is content. If ever you want a home; if the day should come when Briarfield Rectory is yours no longer, come to Nunnely Vicarage. Should the old maid and bachelor be still living, they will make you tenderly welcome."

"There are your flowers. Now," said Caroline, who had kept the nosegay she had selected for him till this moment, "*you* don't care for a bouquet, but you must give it to Margaret: only—to be sentimental for once—keep that little forget-me-not, which is a wild-flower I gathered from the grass; and—to be still more sentimental—let me take two or three of the blue blossoms and put them in my souvenir."

And she took out a small book with enamelled cover and silver clasp, wherein, having opened it, she inserted the flowers, writing round them in pencil—"To be kept for the sake of the Rev. Cyril Hall, my friend. May — 18—."

The Rev. Cyril Hall, on his part also, placed a sprig in safety between the leaves of a pocket Testament: he only wrote on the margin—"Caroline."

"Now," said he, smiling, "I trust we are romantic enough. Miss Keeldar," he continued (the curates, by-the-bye, during this conversation, were too much occupied with their own jokes to notice what passed at the other end of the table), "I hope you are laughing at this trait of '*exaltation*' in the old gray-headed Vicar; but, the fact is, I am so used to comply with the requests of this young friend of

yours, I don't know how to refuse her when she tells me to do anything. You would say it is not much in my way to traffic with flowers and forget-me-nots; but, you see, when requested to be sentimental, I am obedient."

"He is naturally rather sentimental," remarked Caroline: "Margaret told me so, and I know what pleases him."

"That you should be good and happy? Yes; that is one of my greatest pleasures. May God long preserve to you the blessings of peace and innocence! By which phrase, I mean *comparative* innocence; for in His sight, I am well aware, *none* are pure. What, to our human perceptions, looks spotless as we fancy angels, is to Him but frailty, needing the blood of His Son to cleanse, and the strength of His Spirit to sustain. Let us each and all cherish humility—I, as you, my young friends; and we may well do it when we look into our own hearts, and see there temptations, inconsistencies, propensities, even we blush to recognise. And it is not youth, nor good looks, nor grace, nor any gentle outside charm which makes either beauty or goodness in God's eyes. Young ladies, when your mirror or men's tongues flatter you, remember that, in the sight of her Maker, Mary Anne Ainley—a woman whom neither glass nor lips have ever panegyricized—is fairer and better than either of you. She is, indeed," he added, after a pause—"she is, indeed. You young things—wrapt up in yourselves and in

earthly hopes—scarcely live as Christ lived : perhaps you cannot do it yet, while existence is so sweet and earth so smiling to you ; it would be too much to expect : she, with meek heart and due reverence, treads close in her Redeemer's steps."

Here the harsh voice of Donne broke in on the mild tones of Mr. Hall :—

" Ahem !" he began, clearing his throat evidently for a speech of some importance. " Ahem ! Miss Keeldar, your attention an instant, if you please."

" Well," said Shirley, nonchalantly. " What is it ? I listen : all of me is ear that is not eye."

" I hope part of you is hand also," returned Donne, in his vulgarly presumptuous and familiar style, " and part purse : it is to the hand and purse I propose to appeal. I came here this morning with a view to beg of you"—

" You should have gone to Mrs. Gill : she is my almoner."

" To beg of you a subscription to a school. I and Dr. Boulton intend to erect one in the hamlet of Ecclefigg which is under our vicarage of Whinbury. The Baptists have got possession of it : they have a chapel there, and we want to dispute the ground."

" But I have nothing to do with Ecclefigg : I possess no property there."

" What does that signify ? You're a Church-woman, ain't you ?"

" Admirable creature !" muttered Shirley, under her breath : " exquisite address ! fine style ! What

raptures he excites in me!" then, aloud, "I am a Churchwoman, certainly."

"Then you can't refuse to contribute in this case. The population of Eccleffig are a parcel of brutes—we want to civilize them."

"Who is to be the missionary?"

"Myself, probably."

"You won't fail through lack of sympathy with your flock."

"I hope not—I expect success; but we must have money. There is the paper—pray give a handsome sum."

When asked for money, Shirley rarely held back. She put down her name for 5*l.*: after the 300*l.* she had lately given, and the many smaller sums she was giving constantly, it was as much as she could at present afford. Donne looked at it, declared the subscription "shabby," and clamorously demanded more. Miss Keeldar flushed up with some indignation and more astonishment.

"At present, I shall give no more," said she.

"Not give more! Why, I expected you to head the list with a cool hundred. With your property, you should never put down a signature for less."

She was silent.

"In the south," went on Donne, "a lady with a thousand a year would be ashamed to give five pounds for a public object."

Shirley, so rarely haughty, looked so now. Her

slight frame became nerved; her distinguished face quickened with scorn.

“Strange remarks!” said she: “most inconsiderate! Reproach in return for bounty is misplaced.”

“Bounty! Do you call five pounds bounty?”

“I do: and bounty which, had I not given it to Dr. Boulton’s intended school, of the erection of which I approve, and in no sort to his Curate, who seems ill-advised in his manner of applying for—or rather extorting subscriptions,—bounty, I repeat, which, but for this consideration, I should instantly reclaim.”

Donne was thick-skinned: he did not feel all or half that the tone, air, glance of the speaker expressed: he knew not on what ground he stood.

“Wretched place—this Yorkshire,” he went on. “I could never have formed an idea of the country had I not seen it; and the people—rich and poor—what a set! How *corse* and uncultivated! They would be scouted in the south.”

Shirley leaned forwards on the table, her nostrils dilating a little, her taper fingers interlaced and compressing each other hard.

“The rich,” pursued the infatuated and unconscious Donne, “are a parcel of misers—never living as persons with their incomes ought to live: you scarcely—(you must excuse Mr. Donne’s pronunciation, reader; it was very choice; he considered it genteel, and prided himself on his southern accent;

northern ears received with singular sensations his utterance of certain words); you scarsley ever see a fam'ly where a propa carriage or a reg'la butla is kep; and as to the poor—just look at them when they come crowding about the church-doors on the occasion of a marriage or a funeral, clattering in clogs; the men in their shirt-sleeves and wool-comber's aprons, the women in mob-caps and bed-gowns. They pos'tively deserve that one should turn a mad cow in amongst them to rout their rabble-ranks—he! he! What fun it would be!"

"There,—you have reached the climax," said Shirley quietly. "You have reached the climax," she repeated, turning her glowing glance towards him. "You cannot go beyond it, and," she added with emphasis, "you *shall* not, in my house."

Up she rose: nobody could control her now, for she was exasperated; straight she walked to her garden-gates, wide she flung them open.

"Walk through," she said austerely, "and pretty quickly, and set foot on this pavement no more."

Donne was astounded. He had thought all the time he was shewing himself off to high advantage, as a lofty-souled person of the first "ton:" he imagined he was producing a crushing impression. Had he not expressed disdain of everything in Yorkshire? What more conclusive proof could be given that he was better than anything there? And yet here was he about to be turned like a dog out of a Yorkshire

garden! Where, under such circumstances, was the “concatenation accordingly?”

“Rid me of you instantly—instantly!” reiterated Shirley, as he lingered.

“Madam—a clergyman! Turn out a clergyman?”

“Off! Were you an archbishop: you have proved yourself no gentleman, and must go. Quick!”

She was quite resolved: there was no trifling with her: besides, Tartar was again rising; he perceived symptoms of a commotion: he manifested a disposition to join in; there was evidently nothing for it but to go, and Donne made his Exodus; the heiress sweeping him a deep curtesy as she closed the gates on him.

“How dare the pompous priest abuse his flock? How dare the lisping cockney revile Yorkshire?” was her sole observation on the circumstance, as she returned to the table.

Ere long, the little party broke up: Miss Keeldar’s ruffled and darkened brow, curled lip, and incensed eye, gave no invitation to further social enjoyment.

CHAPTER V.

WHITSUNTIDE.

THE fund prospered. By dint of Miss Keeldar's example, the three Rectors' vigorous exertions, and the efficient though quiet aid of their spinster and spectacled lieutenants, Mary Ann Ainley and Margaret Hall, a handsome sum was raised; and this being judiciously managed, served for the present greatly to alleviate the distress of the unemployed poor. The neighbourhood seemed to grow calmer: for a fortnight past no cloth had been destroyed; no outrage on mill or mansion had been committed in the three parishes. Shirley was sanguine that the evil she wished to avert was almost escaped; that the threatened storm was passing over: with the approach of summer she felt certain that trade would improve—it always did; and then this weary war could not last for ever; peace must return one day: with peace what an impulse would be given to commerce!

Such was the usual tenor of her observations to her tenant, Gérard Moore, whenever she met him

where they could converse, and Moore would listen very quietly—too quietly to satisfy her. She would then by her impatient glance demand something more from him—some explanation, or at least some additional remark. Smiling in his way, with that expression which gave a remarkable cast of sweetness to his mouth, while his brow remained grave, he would answer to the effect, that himself too trusted in the finite nature of the war; that it was indeed on that ground the anchor of his hopes was fixed: thereon his speculations depended. “For you are aware,” he would continue, “that I now work Hollow’s mill entirely on speculation: I sell nothing; there is no market for my goods. I manufacture for a future day: I make myself ready to take advantage of the first opening that shall occur. Three months ago this was impossible to me; I had exhausted both credit and capital: you well know who came to my rescue; from what hand I received the loan which saved me. It is on the strength of that loan I am enabled to continue the bold game which, a while since, I feared I should never play more. Total ruin I know will follow loss, and I am aware that gain is doubtful; but I am quite cheerful: so long as I can be active, so long as I can strive, so long, in short, as my hands are not tied, it is impossible for me to be depressed. One year, nay, but six months of the reign of the olive, and I am safe; for, as you say, peace will give an impulse to commerce. In this you are right; but as to the restored tran-

quillity of the neighbourhood—as to the permanent good effect of your charitable fund—I doubt. Eleemosynary relief never yet tranquillized the working-classes—it never made them grateful; it is not in human nature that it should. I suppose, were all things ordered aright, they ought not to be in a position to need that humiliating relief, and this they feel: we should feel it were we so placed. Besides, to whom should they be grateful? To you—to the clergy perhaps, but not to us mill-owners. They hate us worse than ever. Then, the disaffected here are in correspondence with the disaffected elsewhere: Nottingham is one of their headquarters, Manchester another, Birmingham a third. The subalterns receive orders from their chiefs; they are in a good state of discipline: no blow is struck without mature deliberation. In sultry weather, you have seen the sky threaten thunder day by day, and yet night after night the clouds have cleared, and the sun has set quietly; but the danger was not gone, it was only delayed: the long-threatening storm is sure to break at last. There is analogy between the moral and physical atmosphere.”

“Well, Mr. Moore” (so these conferences always ended), “take care of yourself. If you think that I have ever done you any good, reward me by promising to take care of yourself.”

“I do: I will take close and watchful care. I wish to live, not to die: the future opens like Eden before me; and still, when I look deep into the shades of my

paradise, I see a vision, that I like better than seraph or cherub, glide across remote vistas."

"Do you? Pray, what vision?"

"I see ——"

The maid came bustling in with the tea-things.

The early part of that May, as we have seen, was fine, the middle was wet; but in the last week, at change of moon, it cleared again. A fresh wind swept off the silver-white, deep-piled rain-clouds, bearing them, mass on mass, to the eastern horizon; on whose verge they dwindled, and behind whose rim they disappeared, leaving the vault behind all pure blue space, ready for the reign of the summer sun. That sun rose broad on Whitsuntide: the gathering of the schools was signalized by splendid weather.

Whit-Tuesday was the great day, in preparation for which the two large schoolrooms of Briarfield, built by the present Rector, chiefly at his own expense, were cleaned out, whitewashed, repainted, and decorated with flowers and evergreens—some from the Rectory-garden, two cart-loads from Fieldhead, and a wheelbarrowful from the more stingy domain of De Walden, the residence of Mr. Wynne. In these schoolrooms twenty tables, each calculated to accommodate twenty guests, were laid out, surrounded with benches, and covered with white cloths: above them were suspended at least some twenty cages, containing as many canaries, according to a fancy of the district, specially cherished by Mr. Helstone's clerk, who delighted in the piercing song of these birds, and

knew that amidst confusion of tongues they always carolled loudest. These tables, be it understood, were not spread for the twelve hundred scholars to be assembled from the three parishes, but only for the patrons and teachers of the schools: the children's feast was to be spread in the open air. At one o'clock the troops were to come in; at two they were to be marshalled; till four they were to parade the parish; then came the feast, and afterwards the meeting, with music and speechifying in the church.

Why Briarfield was chosen for the point of rendezvous—the scene of the fête—should be explained. It was not because it was the largest or most populous parish—Whinbury far outdid it in that respect; nor because it was the oldest—antique as were the hoary Church and Rectory, Nunnely's low-roofed Temple and mossy Parsonage, buried both in coëval oaks, outstanding sentinels of Nunwood, were older still: it was simply because Mr. Helstone willed it so, and Mr. Helstone's will was stronger than that of Boulby or Hall; the former *could* not, the latter *would* not, dispute a point of precedence with their resolute and imperious brother: they let him lead and rule.

This notable anniversary had always hitherto been a trying day to Caroline Helstone, because it dragged her perforce into public, compelling her to face all that was wealthy, respectable, influential in the neighbourhood; in whose presence, but for the kind countenance of Mr. Hall, she would have appeared unsupported. Obligated to be conspicuous;

obliged to walk at the head of her regiment, as the Rector's niece, and first teacher of the first class; obliged to make tea at the first table for a mixed multitude of ladies and gentlemen; and to do all this without the countenance of mother, aunt, or other chaperon—she, meantime, being a nervous person, who mortally feared publicity—it will be comprehended that, under these circumstances, she trembled at the approach of Whitsuntide.

But this year Shirley was to be with her, and that changed the aspect of the trial singularly—it changed it utterly: it was a trial no longer—it was almost an enjoyment. Miss Keeldar was better in her single self than a host of ordinary friends. Quite self-possessed, and always spirited and easy; conscious of her social importance, yet never presuming upon it, it would be enough to give one courage only to look at her. The only fear was, lest the heiress should not be punctual to tryste: she often had a careless way of lingering behind time, and Caroline knew her uncle would not wait a second for any one: at the moment of the church-clock tolling two, the bells would clash out and the march begin. She must look after Shirley, then, in this matter, or her expected companion would fail her.

Whit-Tuesday saw her rise almost with the sun. She, Fanny, and Eliza were busy the whole morning arranging the Rectory-parlours in first-rate company order, and setting out a collation of cooling refreshments—wine, fruit, cakes—on the dining-room side-

board. Then she had to dress in her freshest and fairest attire of white muslin; the perfect fineness of the day and the solemnity of the occasion warranted, and even exacted, such costume. Her new sash—a birthday-present from Margaret Hall, which she had reason to believe Cyril himself had bought, and in return for which she had indeed given him a set of cambric-bands in a handsome case—was tied by the dexterous fingers of Fanny, who took no little pleasure in arraying her fair young mistress for the occasion; her simple bonnet had been trimmed to correspond with her sash; her pretty but inexpensive scarf of white crape suited her dress. When ready, she formed a picture, not bright enough to dazzle, but fair enough to interest; not brilliantly striking, but very delicately pleasing: a picture in which sweetness of tint, purity of air, and grace of mien, atoned for the absence of rich colouring and magnificent contour. What her brown eye and clear forehead showed of her mind, was in keeping with her dress and face—modest, gentle, and, though pensive, harmonious. It appeared that neither lamb nor dove need fear her, but would welcome rather, in her look of simplicity and softness, a sympathy with their own natures, or with the natures we ascribe to them.

After all, she was an imperfect, faulty human being: fair enough of form, hue, and array; but, as Cyril Hall said, neither so good nor so great as the withered Miss Ainley, now putting on her best

black gown and Quaker-drab shawl and bonnet in her own narrow cottage-chamber.

Away Caroline went, across some very sequestered fields and through some quite hidden lanes, to Field-head. She glided quickly under the green hedges and across the greener leas. There was no dust—no moisture—to soil the hem of her stainless garment, or to damp her slender sandal: after the late rains all was clean, and under the present glowing sun all was dry; she walked fearlessly, then, on daisy and turf, and through thick plantations; she reached Fieldhead, and penetrated to Miss Keeldar's dressing-room.

It was well she had come, or Shirley would have been too late. Instead of making ready with all speed, she lay stretched on a couch, absorbed in reading: Mrs. Pryor stood near, vainly urging her to rise and dress. Caroline wasted no words: she immediately took the book from her, and, with her own hands, commenced the business of disrobing and re-robing her. Shirley, indolent with the heat, and gay with her youth and pleasurable nature, wanted to talk, laugh, and linger; but Caroline, intent on being in time, persevered in dressing her as fast as fingers could fasten strings or insert pins. At length, as she united a final row of hooks and eyes, she found leisure to chide her, saying, she was very naughty to be so unpunctual; that she looked even now the picture of incorrigible carelessness: and so

Shirley did—but a very lovely picture of that tiresome quality.

She presented quite a contrast to Caroline: there was style in every fold of her dress and every line of her figure: the rich silk suited her better than a simpler costume; the deep-embroidered scarf became her; she wore it negligently, but gracefully; the wreath on her bonnet crowned her well: the attention to fashion, the tasteful appliance of ornament in each portion of her dress, were quite in place with her: all this suited her, like the frank light in her eyes, the raillyng smile about her lips, like her shaft-straight carriage and lightsome step. Caroline took her hand when she was dressed, hurried her down-stairs, out of doors, and thus they sped through the fields, laughing as they went, and looking very much like a snow-white dove and gem-tinted bird-of-paradise joined in social flight.

Thanks to Miss Helstone's promptitude, they arrived in good time. While yet trees hid the church, they heard the bell tolling a measured but urgent summons for all to assemble; the trooping in of numbers, the trampling of many steps, and murmuring of many voices were likewise audible. From a rising-ground they presently saw, on the Whinbury-road, the Whinbury school approaching: it numbered five hundred souls. The Rector and Curate, Boulby and Donne, headed it: the former, looming large in full canonicals, walking, as became a beneficed priest, under the canopy of a shovel-hat, with the

dignity of an ample corporation, the embellishment of the squarest and vastest of black coats, and the support of the stoutest of gold-headed canes. As the doctor walked, he now and then slightly flourished his cane, and inclined his shovel-hat with a dogmatical wag towards his aide-de-camp. That aide-de-camp—Donne, to-wit—narrow as the line of his shape was compared to the broad bulk of his principal, contrived, notwithstanding, to look every inch a curate: all about him was pragmatism and self-complacency, from his turned-up nose and elevated chin to his clerical black gaiters, his somewhat short, strapless trousers, and his squared-toed shoes.

Walk on, Mr. Donne! You have undergone scrutiny. You think you look well—whether the white and purple figures watching you from yonder hill think so, is another question.

These figures come running down when the regiment has marched by: the churchyard is full of children and teachers, all in their very best holiday attire: and—distressed as is the district, bad as are the times—it is wonderful to see how respectably—how handsomely even—they have contrived to clothe themselves. That British love of decency will work miracles: the poverty which reduces an Irish girl to rags is impotent to rob the English girl of the neat wardrobe she knows necessary to her self-respect. Besides, the lady of the manor—that Shirley, now gazing with pleasure on this well-dressed and happy-looking crowd—has really done them good: her

seasonable bounty consoled many a poor family against the coming holiday, and supplied many a child with a new frock or bonnet for the occasion; she knows it, and is elate with the consciousness: glad that her money, example, and influence have really—substantially—benefited those around her. She cannot be charitable like Miss Ainley—it is not in her nature: it relieves her to feel that there is another way of being charitable, practicable for other characters, and under other circumstances.

Caroline, too, is pleased; for she also has done good in her small way; robbed herself of more than one dress, ribbon, or collar she could ill spare, to aid in fitting out the scholars of her class; and, as she could not give money, she has followed Miss Ainley's example, in giving her time and her industry to sew for the children.

Not only is the churchyard full, but the Rectory-garden is also thronged: pairs and parties of ladies and gentlemen are seen walking amongst the waving lilacs and laburnums. The house also is occupied: at the wide-open parlour-windows, gay groups are standing. These are the patrons and teachers, who are to swell the procession. In the parson's croft, behind the Rectory, are the musicians of the three parish bands, with their instruments. Fanny and Eliza, in the smartest of caps and gowns, and the whitest of aprons, move amongst them, serving out quarts of ale; whereof a stock was brewed very sound and strong some weeks since,

by the Rector's orders, and under his special superintendence. Whatever he had a hand in, must be managed handsomely: "shabby doings," of any description, were not endured under his sanction: from the erection of a public building, a church, school, or court-house, to the cooking of a dinner, he still advocated the lordly, liberal, and effective. Miss Keeldar was like him in this respect, and they mutually approved each other's arrangements.

Caroline and Shirley were soon in the midst of the company; the former met them very easily for her: instead of sitting down in a retired corner, or stealing away to her own room till the procession should be marshalled, according to her wont, she moved through the three parlours, conversed and smiled, absolutely spoke once or twice ere she was spoken to, and, in short, seemed a new creature. It was Shirley's presence which thus transformed her: the view of Miss Keeldar's air and manner did her a world of good. Shirley had no fear of her kind; no tendency to shrink from, to avoid it. All human beings, men, women, or children, whom low breeding or coarse presumption did not render positively offensive, were welcome enough to her: some much more so than others, of course; but, generally speaking, till a man had indisputably proved himself bad and a nuisance, Shirley was willing to think him good and an acquisition, and to treat him accordingly. This disposition made her a general favourite, for it robbed her very raillery of its sting, and gave her

serious or smiling conversation a happy charm: nor did it diminish the value of her intimate friendship, which was a distinct thing from this social benevolence, depending, indeed, on quite a different part of her character. Miss Helstone was the choice of her affection and intellect; the Misses Pearson, Sykes, Wynne, &c. &c., only the profitters by her good-nature and vivacity.

Donne happened to come into the drawing-room while Shirley, sitting on the sofa, formed the centre of a tolerably wide circle. She had already forgotten her exasperation against him, and she bowed and smiled good-humouredly. The disposition of the man was then seen. He knew neither how to decline the advance with dignity, as one whose just pride has been wounded, nor how to meet it with frankness, as one who is glad to forget and forgive: his punishment had impressed him with no sense of shame, and he did not experience that feeling on encountering his chastiser: he was not vigorous enough in evil to be actively malignant,—he merely passed by sheepishly with a rated, scowling look. Nothing could ever again reconcile him to his enemy; while no passion of resentment, for even sharper and more ignominious inflictions, could his lymphatic nature know.

“He was not worth a scene!” said Shirley to Caroline. “What a fool I was! To revenge on poor Donne his silly spite at Yorkshire, is something like crushing a gnat for attacking the hide

of a rhinoceros. Had I been a gentleman, I believe I should have helped him off the premises by dint of physical force: I am glad now I only employed the moral weapon. But he must come near me no more: I don't like him: he irritates me: there is not even amusement to be had out of him: Malone is better sport."

It seemed as if Malone wished to justify the preference; for the words were scarcely out of the speaker's mouth, when Peter Augustus came up, all in "grande tenue," gloved and scented, with his hair oiled and brushed to perfection, and bearing in one hand a huge bunch of cabbage-roses, five or six in full blow: these he presented to the heiress with a grace to which the most cunning pencil could do but defective justice. And who, after this, could dare to say that Peter was not a lady's man? He had gathered and he had given flowers: he had offered a sentimental—a poetic tribute at the shrine of Love or Mammon. Hercules holding the distaff was but a faint type of Peter bearing the roses. He must have thought this himself, for he seemed amazed at what he had done: he backed without a word; he was going away with a husky chuckle of self-felicitation; then he bethought himself to stop and turn, to ascertain by ocular testimony that he really had presented a bouquet: yes—there were the six red cabbages on the purple satin lap, a very white hand, with some gold rings on the fingers, slightly holding them together, and streaming ringlets, half

hiding a laughing face, drooped over them: only *half*-hiding: Peter saw the laugh—it was unmistakable—he was made a joke of—his gallantry, his chivalry were the subject of a jest for a petticoat—for two petticoats—Miss Helstone too was smiling. Moreover, he felt he was seen through, and Peter grew black as a thunder-cloud. When Shirley looked up, a fell eye was fastened on her: Malone, at least, had energy enough to hate: she saw it in his glance.

“Peter *is* worth a scene, and shall have it, if he likes, one day,” she whispered to her friend.

And now—solemn and sombre as to their colour, though bland enough as to their faces—appeared at the dining-room door the three Rectors: they had hitherto been busy in the church, and were now coming to take some little refreshment for the body, ere the march commenced. The large morocco-covered easy chair had been left vacant for Dr. Boulby; he was put into it, and Caroline, obeying the instigations of Shirley, who told her now was the time to play the hostess, hastened to hand to her uncle’s vast, revered, and, on the whole, worthy friend, a glass of wine and a plate of macaroons. Boulby’s churchwardens, patrons of the Sunday-school both, as he insisted on their being, were already beside him; Mrs. Sykes and the other ladies of his congregation were on his right hand and on his left, expressing their hopes that he was not fatigued, their fears that the day would be too warm

for him. Mrs. Boulton, who held an opinion that when her lord dropped asleep after a good dinner his face became as the face of an angel, was bending over him, tenderly wiping some perspiration, real or imaginary, from his brow: Boulton, in short, was in his glory, and in a round sound "voix de poitrine," he rumbled out thanks for attentions, and assurances of his tolerable health. Of Caroline he took no manner of notice as she came near, save to accept what she offered: he did not see her, he never did see her: he hardly knew that such a person existed. He saw the macaroons, however, and being fond of sweets, possessed himself of a small handful thereof. The wine, Mrs. Boulton insisted on mingling with hot water, and qualifying with sugar and nutmeg.

Mr. Hall stood near an open window, breathing the fresh air and scent of flowers, and talking like a brother to Miss Ainley. To him Caroline turned her attention with pleasure. "What should she bring him? He must not help himself—he must be served by her;" and she provided herself with a little salver, that she might offer him variety. Margaret Hall joined them; so did Miss Keeldar: the four ladies stood round their favourite pastor: they also had an idea that they looked on the face of an earthly angel: Cyril Hall was their pope, infallible to them as Dr. Thomas Boulton to his admirers. A throng, too, enclosed the Rector of Briarfield: twenty or more pressed round him; and no parson was ever more potent in a circle than old Helstone.

The curates herding together after their manner, made a constellation of three lesser planets: divers young ladies watched them afar off, but ventured not nigh.

Mr. Helstone produced his watch. "Ten minutes to two," he announced aloud. "Time for all to fall into line. Come." He seized his shovel-hat and marched away; all rose and followed en masse.

The twelve hundred children were drawn up in three bodies of four hundred souls each: in the rear of each regiment was stationed a band; between every twenty there was an interval, wherein Helstone posted the teachers in pairs: to the van of the armies he summoned:—

"Grace Boulty and Mary Sykes lead out Whinbury."

"Margaret Hall and Mary Ann Ainley conduct Nunnely."

"Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar head Briarfield."

Then again he gave command:—

"Mr. Donne to Whinbury; Mr. Sweeting to Nunnely; Mr. Malone to Briarfield."

And these gentlemen stepped up before the lady-generals.

The Rectors passed to the full front—the parish clerks fell to the extreme rear; Helstone lifted his shovel-hat; in an instant out clashed the eight-bells in the tower, loud swelled the sounding bands, flute

spoke and clarion answered, deep rolled the drums, and away they marched.

The broad white road unrolled before the long procession, the sun and sky surveyed it cloudless, the wind tossed the tree-boughs above it, and the twelve hundred children, and one hundred and forty adults, of which it was composed, trod on in time and tune, with gay faces and glad hearts. It was a joyous scene, and a scene to do good: it was a day of happiness for rich and poor; the work, first, of God, and then of the clergy. Let England's priests have their due: they are a faulty set in some respects, being only of common flesh and blood, like us all; but the land would be badly off without them: Britain would miss her church if that church, fell. God save it! God also reform it!

CHAPTER VI.

THE SCHOOL-FEAST.

NOT on combat bent, nor of foemen in search, was this priest-led and woman-officered company: yet their music played martial tunes, and—to judge by the eyes and carriage of some, Miss Keeldar, for instance—these sounds awoke, if not a martial, yet a longing spirit. Old Helstone, turning by chance, looked into her face, and he laughed, and she laughed at him.

“There is no battle in prospect,” he said; “our country does not want us to fight for it: no foe or tyrant is questioning or threatening our liberty: there is nothing to be done: we are only taking a walk. Keep your hand on the reins, captain, and slack the fire of that spirit: it is not wanted; the more ’s the pity.”

“Take your own advice, Doctor,” was Shirley’s response. To Caroline, she murmured, “I’ll borrow of imagination what reality will not give me. We are not soldiers—bloodshed is not my desire;

or if we are, we are soldiers of the Cross. Time has rolled back some hundreds of years, and we are bound on a pilgrimage to Palestine. But no,—that is too visionary. I need a sterner dream: we are Lowlanders of Scotland, following a covenanting captain up into the hills to hold a meeting out of the reach of persecuting troopers. We know that battle may follow prayer; and, as we believe that in the worst issue of battle, Heaven must be our reward, we are ready and willing to redden the peat-moss with our blood. That music stirs my soul; it wakens all my life; it makes my heart beat: not with its temperate daily pulse, but with a new, thrilling vigour. I almost long for danger; for a faith—a land—or, at least, a lover to defend.”

“Look, Shirley!” interrupted Caroline. “What is that red speck above Stilbro’ Brow? You have keener sight than I; just turn your eagle eye to it.”

Miss Keeldar looked. “I see,” she said: then added, presently; “there is a line of red. They are soldiers—cavalry soldiers,” she subjoined quickly: “they ride fast; there are six of them: they will pass us: no—they have turned off to the right: they saw our procession, and avoid it by making a circuit. Where are they going?”

“Perhaps they are only exercising their horses.”

“Perhaps so. We see them no more now.”

Mr. Helstone here spoke.

“We shall pass through Royd-lane, to reach Nunnely Common by a short cut,” said he.

And into the straits of Royd-lane they accordingly defiled. It was very narrow,—so narrow that only two could walk abreast without falling into the ditch which ran along each side. They had gained the middle of it, when excitement became obvious in the clerical commanders: Boulty's spectacles and Helstone's Rheoboam we reagitated: the Curates nudged each other: Mr. Hall turned to the ladies and smiled.

“What is the matter?” was the demand.

He pointed with his staff to the end of the lane before them. Lo and behold! another,—an opposition procession was there entering, headed also by men in black, and followed also, as they could now hear, by music.

“Is it our double?” asked Shirley: “our manifold wraith? Here is a card turned up.”

“If you wanted a battle, you are likely to get one,—at least of looks,” whispered Caroline, laughing.

“They shall not pass us!” cried the Curates, unanimously: “we'll not give way!”

“Give way!” retorted Helstone, sternly, turning round; “who talks of giving way? You, boys, mind what you are about: the ladies, I know, will be firm; I can trust them. There is not a church-woman here but will stand her ground against these folks, for the honour of the Establishment. What does Miss Keeldar say?”

“She asks what is it?”

“The Dissenting and Methodist schools, the Bap-

tists, Independents, and Wesleyans, joined in unholy alliance, and turning purposely into this lane with the intention of obstructing our march and driving us back."

"Bad manners!" said Shirley; "and I hate bad manners. Of course, they must have a lesson."

"A lesson in politeness," suggested Mr. Hall, who was ever for peace: "not an example of rudeness."

Old Helstone moved on. Quickening his step, he marched some yards in advance of his company. He had nearly reached the other sable leaders, when he who appeared to act as the hostile commander-in-chief—a large, greasy man, with black hair combed flat on his forehead—called a halt. The procession paused: he drew forth a hymn-book, gave out a verse, set a tune, and they all struck up the most dolorous of canticles.

Helstone signed to his bands: they clashed out with all the power of brass. He desired them to play "Rule, Britannia," and ordered the children to join in vocally, which they did with enthusiastic spirit. The enemy was sung and stormed down; his psalm quelled: as far as noise went, he was conquered.

"Now, follow me!" exclaimed Helstone; "not at a run, but at a firm, smart pace. Be steady, every child and woman of you:—keep together:—hold on by each other's skirts, if necessary."

And he strode on with such a determined and

deliberate gait, and was, besides, so well seconded by his scholars and teachers—who did exactly as he told them, neither running nor faltering, but marching with cool, solid impetus; the Curates, too, being compelled to do the same, as they were between two fires,—Helstone and Miss Keeldar,—both of whom watched any deviation with lynx-eyed vigilance, and were ready, the one with his cane, the other with her parasol, to rebuke the slightest breach of orders, the least independent or irregular demonstration,—that the body of Dissenters were first amazed, then alarmed, then borne down and pressed back, and at last forced to turn tail and leave the outlet from Royd-lane free. Boulton suffered in the onslaught, but Helstone and Malone, between them, held him up, and brought him through the business, whole in limb, though sorely tried in wind.

The fat Dissenter who had given out the hymn was left sitting in the ditch. He was a spirit-merchant by trade, a leader of the Nonconformists, and, it was said, drank more water in that one afternoon than he had swallowed for a twelvemonth before. Mr. Hall had taken care of Caroline, and Caroline of him: he and Miss Ainley made their own quiet comments to each other afterwards on the incident. Miss Keeldar and Mr. Helstone shook hands heartily when they had fairly got the whole party through the lane. The Curates began to exult, but Mr. Helstone presently put the curb on their innocent spirits: he remarked that they never had sense to know what to

say, and had better hold their tongues; and he reminded them that the business was none of their managing.

About half-past three the procession turned back, and at four once more regained the starting-place. Long lines of benches were arranged in the close-shorn fields round the school: there the children were seated, and huge baskets, covered up with white cloths, and great smoking tin vessels were brought out. Ere the distribution of good things commenced, a brief grace was pronounced by Mr. Hall, and sung by the children: their young voices sounded melodious, even touching, in the open air. Large currant buns, and hot, well-sweetened tea were then administered in the proper spirit of liberality: no stinting was permitted on this day, at least; the rule for each child's allowance being that it was to have about twice as much as it could possibly eat, thus leaving a reserve to be carried home for such as age, sickness, or other impediment, prevented from coming to the feast. Buns and beer circulated, meantime, amongst the musicians and church-singers: afterwards the benches were removed, and they were left to unbend their spirits in licensed play.

A bell summoned the teachers, patrons, and patronesses to the schoolroom; Miss Keeldar, Miss Helstone, and many other ladies were already there, glancing over the arrangement of their separate trays and tables. Most of the female servants of

the neighbourhood, together with the clerks', the singers', and the musicians' wives, had been pressed into the service of the day as waiters: each vied with the other in smartness and daintiness of dress, and many handsome forms were seen amongst the younger ones. About half a score were cutting bread and butter; another half-score supplying hot water, brought from the coppers of the Rector's kitchen. The profusion of flowers and evergreens decorating the white walls, the show of silver tea-pots and bright porcelain on the tables, the active figures, blithe faces, gay dresses flitting about everywhere, formed altogether a refreshing and lively spectacle. Everybody talked, not very loudly, but merrily, and the canary birds sang shrill in their high-hung cages.

Caroline, as the Rector's niece, took her place at one of the three first tables; Mrs. Boulby and Margaret Hall officiated at the others. At these tables the *élite* of the company were to be entertained; strict rules of equality not being more in fashion at Briarfield than elsewhere. Miss Helstone removed her bonnet and scarf, that she might be less oppressed with the heat; her long curls, falling on her neck, served almost in place of a veil, and for the rest, her muslin dress was fashioned modestly as a nun's robe, enabling her thus to dispense with the encumbrance of a shawl.

The room was filling: Mr. Hall had taken his post beside Caroline, who now, as she re-arranged

the cups and spoons before her, whispered to him in a low voice remarks on the events of the day. He looked a little grave about what had taken place in Royd-lane, and she tried to smile him out of his seriousness. Miss Keeldar sat near; for a wonder, neither laughing nor talking; on the contrary, very still, and gazing round her vigilantly: she seemed afraid lest some intruder should take a seat she apparently wished to reserve next her own; ever and anon she spread her satin dress over an undue portion of the bench, or laid her gloves or her embroidered handkerchief upon it. Caroline noticed this manège at last, and asked her what friend she expected. Shirley bent towards her, almost touched her ear with her rosy lips, and whispered with a musical softness that often characterized her tones, when what she said tended even remotely to stir some sweet secret source of feeling in her heart:—

“I expect Mr. Moore: I saw him last night, and I made him promise to come with his sister, and to sit at our table: he won't fail me, I feel certain, but I apprehend his coming too late, and being separated from us. Here is a fresh batch arriving; every place will be taken: provoking!”

In fact Mr. Wynne the magistrate, his wife, his son, and his two daughters, now entered in high state. They were Briarfield gentry: of course their place was at the first table, and being conducted thither, they filled up the whole remaining space. For Miss Keeldar's comfort, Mr. Sam Wynne in-

ducted himself into the very vacancy she had kept for Moore, planting himself solidly on her gown, her gloves, and her handkerchief. Mr. Sam was one of the objects of her aversion; and the more so because he showed serious symptoms of an aim at her hand. The old gentleman, too, had publicly declared that the Fieldhead estate and the De Walden estate were delightfully *contagious*—a malapropism which rumour had not failed to repeat to Shirley.

Caroline's ears yet rung with that thrilling whisper, "I expect Mr. Moore," her heart yet beat and her cheek yet glowed with it, when a note from the organ pealed above the confused hum of the place. Dr. Boulton, Mr. Helstone, and Mr. Hall rose, so did all present, and grace was sung to the accompaniment of the music; and then tea began. She was kept too busy with her office for a while to have leisure for looking round, but the last cup being filled, she threw a restless glance over the room. There were some ladies and several gentlemen standing about yet unaccommodated with seats: amidst a group she recognised her spinster friend, Miss Mann, whom the fine weather had tempted, or some urgent friend had persuaded, to leave her drear solitude for one hour of social enjoyment. Miss Mann looked tired of standing: a lady in a yellow bonnet brought her a chair. Caroline knew well that "chapeau en satin jaune;" she knew the black hair, and the kindly, though rather opinionated and froward-looking face under it; she knew that "robe de soie

noire ;” she knew even that “schal gris de lin ;” she knew, in short, Hortense Moore, and she wanted to jump up and run to her and kiss her—to give her one embrace for her own sake, and two for her brother’s. She half rose, indeed, with a smothered exclamation, and perhaps—for the impulse was very strong—she would have run across the room, and actually saluted her, but a hand replaced her in her seat, and a voice behind her whispered:—

“Wait till after tea, Lina, and then I’ll bring her to you.”

And when she *could* look up she did, and there was Robert himself close behind, smiling at her eagerness, looking better than she had ever seen him look—looking, indeed, to her partial eyes, so very handsome, that she dared not trust herself to hazard a second glance ; for his image struck on her vision with painful brightness, and pictured itself on her memory as vividly as if there daguerretyped by a pencil of keen lightning.

He moved on, and spoke to Miss Keeldar. Shirley, irritated by some unwelcome attentions from Sam Wynne, and by the fact of that gentleman being still seated on her gloves and handkerchief—and probably, also, by Moore’s want of punctuality—was by no means in good humour. She first shrugged her shoulder at him, and then she said a bitter word or two about his “insupportable tardiness.” Moore neither apologized nor retorted : he stood near her quietly, as if waiting to see whether she would

recover her temper ; which she did in little more than three minutes, indicating the change by offering him her hand. Moore took it with a smile, half-corrective, half-grateful : the slightest possible shake of the head delicately marked the former quality ; it is probable a gentle pressure indicated the latter.

“ You may sit where you can now, Mr. Moore,” said Shirley, also smiling : “ you see there is not an inch of room for you here ; but I discern plenty of space at Mrs. Boulby’s table, between Miss Armitage and Miss Birtwhistle ; go : John Sykes will be your vis-à-vis, and you will sit with your back towards us.”

Moore, however, preferred lingering about where he was : he now and then took a turn down the long room, pausing in his walk to interchange greetings with other gentlemen in his own placeless predicament ; but still he came back to the magnet, Shirley, bringing with him, each time he returned, observations it was necessary to whisper in her ear.

Meantime, poor Sam Wynne looked far from comfortable : his fair neighbour, judging from her movements, appeared in a mood the most unquiet and unaccommodating : she would not sit still two seconds : she was hot ; she fanned herself ; complained of want of air and space. She remarked, that, in her opinion, when people had finished their tea they ought to leave the tables, and announced distinctly that she expected to faint if the present state of things continued. Mr. Sam offered to accompany her into the open air ; just

the way to give her her death of cold, she alleged : in short, his post became untenable ; and having swallowed his quantum of tea, he judged it expedient to evacuate.

Moore should have been at hand, whereas he was quite at the other extremity of the room, deep in conference with Christopher Sykes. A large corn-factor, Timothy Ramsden, Esq., happened to be nearer, and feeling himself tired of standing, he advanced to fill the vacant seat. Shirley's expedients did not fail her : a sweep of her scarf upset her teacup, its contents were shared between the bench and her own satin dress. Of course, it became necessary to call a waiter to remedy the mischief : Mr. Ramsden, a stout, puffy gentleman, as large in person as he was in property, held aloof from the consequent commotion. Shirley, usually almost culpably indifferent to slight accidents affecting dress, &c., now made a commotion that might have become the most delicate and nervous of her sex : Mr. Ramsden opened his mouth, withdrew slowly, and, as Miss Keeldar again intimated her intention to "give way" and swoon on the spot, he turned on his heel, and beat a heavy retreat.

Moore at last returned : calmly surveying the bustle, and somewhat quizzically scanning Shirley's enigmatical-looking countenance, he remarked, that in truth this was the hottest end of the room ; that he found a climate there calculated to agree with none but cool temperaments like his own ; and, putting the

waiters, the napkins, the satin robe, the whole turmoil, in short, to one side, he installed himself where destiny evidently decreed he should sit. Shirley subsided; her features altered their lines: the raised knit brow and inexplicable curve of the mouth became straight again: wilfulness and roguery gave place to other expressions; and all the angular movements with which she had vexed the soul of Sam Wynne were conjured to rest as by a charm. Still no gracious glance was cast on Moore: on the contrary, he was accused of giving her a world of trouble, and roundly charged with being the cause of depriving her of the esteem of Mr. Ramsden, and the invaluable friendship of Mr. Samuel Wynne.

“Wouldn’t have offended either gentleman for the world,” she averred: “I have always been accustomed to treat both with the most respectful consideration, and there, owing to you, how they have been used! I shall not be happy till I have made it up: I never am happy till I am friends with my neighbours; so to-morrow I must make a pilgrimage to Royd corn-mill, soothe the miller, and praise the grain, and next day I must call at De Walden—where I hate to go—and carry in my reticule half an oat-cake to give to Mr. Sam’s favourite pointers.”

“You know the surest path to the heart of each swain, I doubt not,” said Moore, quietly. He looked very content to have at last secured his present place; but he made no fine speech expressive of gratification, and offered no apology for the trouble

he had given. His phlegm became him wonderfully: it made him look handsomer, he was so composed: it made his vicinage pleasant, it was so peace-restoring. You would not have thought, to look at him, that he was a poor, struggling man seated beside a rich woman; the calm of equality stilled his aspect: perhaps that calm, too, reigned in his soul. Now and then, from the way in which he looked down on Miss Keeldar as he addressed her, you would have fancied his station towered above hers as much as his stature did. Almost stern lights sometimes crossed his brow and gleamed in his eyes: their conversation had become animated, though it was confined to a low key; she was urging him with questions—evidently, he refused to her curiosity all the gratification it demanded. She sought his eye once with hers: you read, in its soft yet eager expression, that it solicited clearer replies. Moore smiled pleasantly, but his lips continued unsealed. Then she was piqued and turned away, but he recalled her attention in two minutes: he seemed making promises, which he soothed her into accepting, in lieu of information.

It appeared that the heat of the room did not suit Miss Helstone: she grew paler and paler as the process of tea-making was protracted. The moment thanks were returned, she quitted the table, and hastened to follow her cousin Hortense, who, with Miss Mann, had already sought the open air. Robert Moore had risen when she did—perhaps he

meant to speak to her ; but there was yet a parting word to exchange with Miss Keeldar, and while it was being uttered, Caroline had vanished.

Hortense received her former pupil with a demeanour of more dignity than warmth: she had been seriously offended by Mr. Helstone's proceedings, and had all along considered Caroline to blame, in obeying her uncle too literally.

“ You are a very great stranger,” she said, austere, as her pupil held and pressed her hand. The pupil knew her too well to remonstrate or complain of coldness ; she let the punctilious whim pass, sure that her natural *bonté* (I use this French word, because it expresses just what I mean ; neither goodness nor good nature, but something between the two) would presently get the upper-hand. It did : Hortense had no sooner examined her face well, and observed the change its somewhat wasted features betrayed, than her mien softened. Kissing her on both cheeks, she asked anxiously after her health : Caroline answered gaily. It would, however, have been her lot to undergo a long cross-examination, followed by an endless lecture on this head, had not Miss Mann called off the attention of the questioner, by requesting to be conducted home. The poor invalid was already fatigued : her weariness made her cross—too cross almost to speak to Caroline ; and besides, that young person's white dress and lively look were displeasing in the eyes of Miss Mann : the everyday garb of brown stuff or gray gingham, and

the everyday air of melancholy, suited the solitary spinster better: she would hardly know her young friend to-night, and quitted her with a cool nod. Hortense having promised to accompany her home, they departed together.

Caroline now looked round for Shirley. She saw the rainbow scarf and purple dress in the centre of a throng of ladies, all well-known to herself, but all of the order whom she systematically avoided whenever avoidance was possible. Shyer at some moments than at others, she felt just now no courage at all to join this company: she could not, however, stand alone where all others went in pairs or parties, so she approached a group of her own scholars, great girls, or rather young women, who were standing watching some hundreds of the younger children playing at blind-man's-buff.

Miss Helstone knew these girls liked her, yet she was shy even with them out of school: they were not more in awe of her than she of them: she drew near them now, rather to find protection in their company than to patronize them with her presence. By some instinct they knew her weakness, and with natural politeness they respected it. Her knowledge commended their esteem when she taught them; her gentleness attracted their regard; and because she was what they considered wise and good when *on* duty, they kindly overlooked her evident timidity when off: they did not take advantage of it. Peasant girls as they were, they had

too much of her own English sensibility to be guilty of the coarse error: they stood round her still, civil, friendly, receiving her slight smiles, and rather hurried efforts to converse, with a good feeling and good breeding: the last quality being the result of the first, which soon set her at her ease.

Mr. Sam Wynne coming up with great haste, to insist on the elder girls joining in the game as well as the younger ones, Caroline was again left alone. She was meditating a quiet retreat to the house, when Shirley, perceiving from afar her isolation, hastened to her side.

“Let us go to the top of the fields,” she said: “I know you don’t like crowds, Caroline.”

“But it will be depriving you of a pleasure, Shirley, to take you from all these fine people, who court your society so assiduously, and to whom you can, without art or effort, make yourself so pleasant.”

“Not quite without effort: I am already tired of the exertion: it is but insipid, barren work, talking and laughing with the good gentlefolks of Briar-field. I have been looking out for your white dress for the last ten minutes: I like to watch those I love in a crowd, and to compare them with others: I have thus compared you. You resemble none of the rest, Lina: there are some prettier faces than yours here; you are not a model-beauty like Harriet Sykes, for instance; beside her, your person appears almost insignificant; but you look agreeable

—you look reflective—you look what I call interesting.”

“Hush, Shirley! You flatter me.”

“I don’t wonder that your scholars like you.”

“Nonsense, Shirley: talk of something else.”

“We will talk of Moore, then, and we will watch him: I see him even now.”

“Where?” And as Caroline asked the question, she looked not over the fields, but into Miss Keeldar’s eyes, as was her wont whenever Shirley mentioned any object she descried afar. Her friend had quicker vision than herself; and Caroline seemed to think that the secret of her eagle acuteness might be read in her dark gray irids: or rather, perhaps, she only sought guidance by the direction of those discriminating and brilliant spheres.

“There is Moore,” said Shirley, pointing right across the wide field where a thousand children were playing, and now nearly a thousand adult spectators walking about. “There—can you miss the tall stature and straight port? He looks amidst the set that surround him like Eliab amongst humbler shepherds—like Saul in a war-council: and a war-council it is, if I am not mistaken.”

“Why so, Shirley?” asked Caroline, whose eye had at last caught the object it sought. “Robert is just now speaking to my uncle, and they are shaking hands; they are then reconciled.”

“Reconciled not without good reason, depend on it: making common cause against some common

foe. And why, think you, are Messrs. Wynne and Sykes, and Armitage and Ramsden, gathered in such a close circle round them? And why is Malone beckoned to join them? Where *he* is summoned, be sure a strong arm is needed."

Shirley, as she watched, grew restless: her eyes flashed.

"They won't trust me," she said: "that is always the way when it comes to the point."

"What about?"

"Cannot you feel? There is some mystery afloat: some event is expected; some preparation is to be made, I am certain: I saw it all in Mr. Moore's manner this evening: he was excited, yet hard."

"Hard to *you*, Shirley!"

"Yes, to *me*. He often is hard to me. We seldom converse tête-à-tête, but I am made to feel that the basis of his character is not of cider down."

"Yet he seemed to talk to you softly."

"Did he not? Very gentle tones and quiet manner; yet the man is peremptory and secret: his secrecy vexes me."

"Yes—Robert is secret."

"Which he has scarcely a right to be with me; especially as he commenced by giving me his confidence. Having done nothing to forfeit that confidence, it ought not to be withdrawn: but I suppose I am not considered iron-souled enough to be trusted in a crisis."

“He fears, probably, to occasion you uneasiness.”

“An unnecessary precaution: I am of elastic materials, not soon crushed; he ought to know that: but the man is proud: he has his faults, say what you will, Lina. Observe how engaged that group appear: they do not know we are watching them.”

“If we keep on the alert, Shirley, we shall perhaps find the clue to their secret.”

“There will be some unusual movements ere long—perhaps to-morrow—possibly to-night. But my eyes and ears are wide open: Mr. Moore, you shall be under surveillance. Be you vigilant also, Lina.”

“I will: Robert is going, I saw him turn—I believe he noticed us—they are shaking hands.”

“Shaking hands, with emphasis,” added Shirley; “as if they were ratifying some solemn league and covenant.”

They saw Robert quit the group, pass through a gate, and disappear.

“And he has not bid us good-bye,” murmured Caroline.

Scarcely had the words escaped her lips, when she tried by a smile to deny the confession of disappointment they seemed to imply. An unbidden suffusion for one moment both softened and brightened her eyes.

“Oh, that is soon remedied!” exclaimed Shirley. “We’ll *make* him bid us good-bye.”

“*Make* him! That is not the same thing,” was the answer.

“It *shall* be the same thing.”

“But he is gone: you can’t overtake him.”

“I know a shorter way than that he has taken: we will intercept him.”

“But, Shirley, I would rather not go.”

Caroline said this as Miss Keeldar seized her arm, and hurried her down the fields. It was vain to contend: nothing was so wilful as Shirley, when she took a whim into her head: Caroline found herself out of sight of the crowd almost before she was aware, and ushered into a narrow shady spot, embowered above with hawthorns, and enamelled under foot with daisies. She took no notice of the evening sun chequering the turf nor was she sensible of the pure incense exhaling at this hour from tree and plant; she only heard the wicket opening at one end, and knew Robert was approaching. The long sprays of the hawthorns, shooting out before them, served as a screen; they saw him before he observed them. At a glance Caroline perceived that his social hilarity was gone: he had left it behind him in the joy-echoing fields round the school; what remained now was his dark, quiet, business countenance. As Shirley had said, a certain hardness characterized his air, while his eye was excited, but austere. So much the worse-timed was the present freak of Shirley’s: if he had looked disposed for holiday mirth, it would not have mattered much, but now——

“I told you not to come,” said Caroline, somewhat bitterly, to her friend. She seemed truly perturbed: to be intruded on Robert thus, against her will and his expectation, and when he evidently would rather not be delayed, keenly annoyed her. It did not annoy Miss Keeldar in the least: she stepped forward and faced her tenant, barring his way:—

“You omitted to bid us good-bye,” she said.

“Omitted to bid you good-bye! Where did you come from? Are you fairies? I left two like you, one in purple and one in white, standing at the top of a bank, four fields off, but a minute ago.”

“You left us there and find us here. We have been watching you; and shall watch you still: you must be questioned one day, but not now: at present, all you have to do is to say good-night, and then pass.”

Moore glanced from one to the other, without unbending his aspect. “Days of fête have their privileges, and so have days of hazard,” observed he, gravely.

“Come — don’t moralize: say good-night, and pass,” urged Shirley.

“Must I say good-night to you, Miss Keeldar?”

“Yes, and to Caroline, likewise. It is nothing new, I hope: you have bid us both good-night before.”

He took her hand, held it in one of his, and covered it with the other: he looked down at her

gravely, kindly, yet commandingly. The heiress could not make this man her subject: in his gaze on her bright face there was no servility, hardly homage; but there was interest and affection, heightened by another feeling: something in his tone when he spoke, as well as in his words, marked that last sentiment to be gratitude.

“Your debtor bids you good-night!—May you rest safely and serenely till morning!”

“And you, Mr. Moore,—what are you going to do? What have you been saying to Mr. Helstone, with whom I saw you shake hands? Why did all those gentlemen gather round you? Put away reserve for once: be frank with me.”

“Who can resist you? I will be frank: to-morrow, if there is anything to relate, you shall hear it.”

“Just now,” pleaded Shirley: “don’t procrastinate.”

“But I could only tell half a tale; and my time is limited,—I have not a moment to spare: hereafter I will make amends for delay by candour.”

“But are you going home?”

“Yes.”

“Not to leave it any more to-night?”

“Certainly not. At present, farewell to both of you!”

He would have taken Caroline’s hand and joined it in the same clasp in which he held Shirley’s, but somehow it was not ready for him; she had with-

drawn a few steps apart: her answer to Moore's adieu was only a slight bend of the head, and a gentle, serious smile. He sought no more cordial token: again he said "Farewell!" and quitted them both.

"There!—it is over!" said Shirley, when he was gone. "We have made him bid us good-night, and yet not lost ground in his esteem, I think, Cary."

"I hope not," was the brief reply.

"I consider you very timid and undemonstrative," remarked Miss Keeldar. "Why did you not give Moore your hand when he offered you his? He is your cousin: you like him. Are you ashamed to let him perceive your affection?"

"He perceives all of it that interests him: no need to make a display of feeling."

"You are laconic: you would be stoical if you could. Is love, in your eyes, a crime, Caroline?"

"Love, a crime! No, Shirley:—love is a divine virtue; but why drag that word into the conversation? it is singularly irrelevant!"

"Good!" pronounced Shirley.

The two girls paced the green lane in silence. Caroline first resumed.

"Obtrusiveness is a crime; forwardness is a crime; and both disgust: but love!—no purest angel need blush to love! And when I see or hear either man or woman couple shame with love, I know their minds are coarse, their associations debased. Many who think themselves refined ladies

and gentlemen, and on whose lips the word "vulgarity" is for ever hovering, cannot mention "love" without betraying their own innate and imbecile degradation: it is a low feeling in their estimation, connected only with low ideas for them."

"You describe three-fourths of the world, Caroline."

"They are cold—they are cowardly—they are stupid on the subject, Shirley! They never loved—they never were loved!"

"Thou art right, Lina! And in their dense ignorance they blaspheme living fire, seraph-brought from a divine altar."

"They confound it with sparks mounting from Tophet!"

The sudden and joyous clash of bells here stopped the dialogue by summoning all to the church.

CHAPTER VII.

WHICH THE GENTEEL READER IS RECOMMENDED TO SKIP, LOW PERSONS BEING HERE INTRODUCED.

THE evening was still and warm; close and sultry it even promised to become. Round the descending sun the clouds glowed purple: summer tints, rather Indian than English, suffused the horizon, and cast rosy reflections on hill-side, house-front, tree-bole; on winding road, and undulating pasture-ground. The two girls came down from the fields slowly: by the time they reached the churchyard the bells were hushed; the multitudes were gathered into the church: the whole scene was solitary.

“How pleasant and calm it is!” said Caroline.

“And how hot it will be in the church!” responded Shirley; “and what a dreary long speech Dr. Boulton will make! and how the Curates will hammer over their prepared orations! For my part, I would rather not enter.”

“But my uncle will be angry, if he observes our absence.”

“ I will bear the brunt of his wrath : he will not devour me. I shall be sorry to miss his pungent speech. I know it will be all sense for the Church, and all causticity for Schism : he'll not forget the battle of Royd-lane. I shall be sorry also to deprive you of Mr. Hall's sincere friendly homily, with all its racy Yorkshireisms ; but here I must stay. The gray church and grayer tombs look divine with this crimson gleam on them. Nature is now at her evening prayers : she is kneeling before those red hills. I see her prostrate on the great steps of her altar, praying for a fair night for mariners at sea, for travellers in deserts, for lambs on moors, and unfledged birds in woods. Caroline, I see her ! and I will tell you what she is like : she is like what Eve was when she and Adam stood alone on earth.”

“ And that is not Milton's Eve, Shirley.”

“ Milton's Eve ! Milton's Eve ! I repeat. No, by the pure Mother of God, she is not ! Cary, we are alone : we may speak what we think. Milton was great ; but was he good ? His brain was right ; how was his heart ? He saw Heaven : he looked down on Hell. He saw Satan, and Sin his daughter, and Death their horrible offspring. Angels serried before him their battalions : the long lines of adamantine shields flashed back on his blind eyeballs the unutterable splendor of heaven. Devils gathered their legions in his sight : their dim, discrowned, and tarnished armies passed rank and file before

him. Milton tried to see the first woman; but, Cary, he saw her not."

"You are bold to say so, Shirley."

"Not more bold than faithful. It was his cook that he saw; or it was Mrs. Gill, as I have seen her, making custards, in the heat of summer, in the cool dairy, with rose-trees and nasturtiums about the latticed window, preparing a cold collation for the Rectors,—preserves, and 'dulcet creams'—puzzled 'what choice to choose for delicacy best; what order so contrived as not to mix tastes, not well-joined, inelegant; but bring taste after taste, upheld with kindest change.'"

"All very well too, Shirley."

"I would beg to remind him that the first men of the earth were Titans, and that Eve was their mother: from her sprang Saturn, Hyperion, Oceanus; she bore Prometheus——"

"Pagan that you are! what does that signify?"

"I say, there were giants on the earth in those days: giants that strove to scale heaven. The first woman's breast that heaved with life on this world yielded the daring which could contend with Omnipotence: the strength which could bear a thousand years of bondage,—the vitality which could feed that vulture death through uncounted ages,—the unexhausted life and uncorrupted excellence, sisters to immortality, which, after millenniums of crimes, struggles, and woes, could conceive and bring forth a Messiah. The first woman was heaven-born: vast

was the heart whence gushed the well-spring of the blood of nations; and grand the undegenerate head where rested the consort-crown of creation."

"She coveted an apple, and was cheated by a snake: but you have got such a hash of Scripture and mythology into your head that there is no making any sense of you. You have not yet told me what you saw kneeling on those hills."

"I saw—I now see—a woman-Titan: her robe of blue air spreads to the outskirts of the heath, where yonder flock is grazing; a veil white as an avalanche sweeps from her head to her feet, and arabesques of lightning flame on its borders. Under her breast I see her zone, purple like that horizon: through its blush shines the star of evening. Her steady eyes I cannot picture; they are clear—they are deep as lakes—they are lifted and full of worship—they tremble with the softness of love and the lustre of prayer. Her forehead has the expanse of a cloud, and is paler than the early moon, risen long before dark gathers: she reclines her bosom on the ridge of Stilbro' Moor; her mighty hands are joined beneath it. So kneeling, face to face she speaks with God. That Eve is Jehovah's daughter, as Adam was his son."

"She is very vague and visionary! Come, Shirley, we ought to go into church."

"Caroline, I will not: I will stay out here with my mother Eve, in these days called Nature. I love

her—undying, mighty being! Heaven may have faded from her brow when she fell in paradise; but all that is glorious on earth shines there still. She is taking me to her bosom, and showing me her heart. Hush, Caroline! you will see her and feel as I do, if we are both silent.”

“I will humour your whim; but you will begin talking again, ere ten minutes are over.”

Miss Keeldar, on whom the soft excitement of the warm summer evening seemed working with unwonted power, leaned against an upright headstone: she fixed her eyes on the deep-burning west, and sank into a pleasurable trance. Caroline, going a little apart, paced to and fro beneath the Rectory garden-wall, dreaming, too, in her way. Shirley had mentioned the word “mother:” that word suggested to Caroline’s imagination not the mighty and mystical parent of Shirley’s visions, but a gentle human form—the form she ascribed to her own mother; unknown, unloved, but not unlonged-for.

“Oh, that the day would come when she would remember her child! Oh, that I might know her, and knowing, love her!”

Such was her aspiration.

The longing of her childhood filled her soul again. The desire which many a night had kept her awake in her crib, and which fear of its fallacy had of late years almost extinguished, relit suddenly, and glowed warm in her heart: that her mother might come some happy day, and send for her to her presence—look

upon her fondly with loving eyes, and say to her tenderly, in a sweet voice:—

“Caroline, my child, I have a home for you; you shall live with me. All the love you have needed, and not tasted, from infancy, I have saved for you carefully. Come! it shall cherish you now.”

A noise on the road roused Caroline from her filial hopes, and Shirley from her Titan visions. They listened, and heard the tramp of horses: they looked, and saw a glitter through the trees: they caught through the foliage glimpses of martial scarlet; helm shone, plume waved. Silent and orderly, six soldiers rode softly by.

“The same we saw this afternoon,” whispered Shirley: “they have been halting somewhere till now. They wish to be as little noticed as possible, and are seeking their rendezvous at this quiet hour, while the people are at church. Did I not say we should see unusual things ere long?”

Scarcely were sight and sound of the soldiers lost, when another and somewhat different disturbance broke the night-hush—a child’s impatient scream. They looked: a man issued from the church, carrying in his arms an infant—a robust, ruddy little boy, of some two years old—roaring with all the power of his lungs; he had probably just awaked from a church-sleep: two little girls, of nine and ten, followed. The influence of the fresh air, and the attraction of some flowers gathered from a grave, soon quieted the child; the man sat down with him, dandling him on his knee

as tenderly as any woman; the two little girls took their places one on each side.

“Good-evening, William,” said Shirley, after due scrutiny of the man. He had seen her before, and apparently was waiting to be recognised; he now took off his hat, and grinned a smile of pleasure. He was a rough-headed, hard-featured personage, not old, but very weather-beaten; his attire was decent and clean, that of his children singularly neat: it was our old friend, Farren. The young ladies approached him.

“You are not going into the church?” he inquired, gazing at them complacently, yet with a mixture of bashfulness in his look: a sentiment not by any means the result of awe of their station, but only of appreciation of their elegance and youth. Before gentlemen—such as Moore or Helstone, for instance—William was often a little dogged; with proud or insolent ladies, too, he was quite unmanageable, sometimes very resentful; but he was most sensible of, most tractable to, good-humour and civility. His nature—a stubborn one—was repelled by inflexibility in other natures; for which reason, he had never been able to like his former master, Moore; and, unconscious of that gentleman’s good opinion of himself, and of the service he had secretly rendered him in recommending him as gardener to Mr. Yorke, and by this means to other families in the neighbourhood, he continued to harbour a grudge against his austerity. Latterly, he had often worked at Fieldhead; Miss

Keeldar's frank, hospitable manners were perfectly charming to him. Caroline he had known from her childhood: unconsciously, she was his ideal of a lady. Her gentle mien, step, gestures, her grace of person and attire, moved some artist-fibres about his peasant heart: he had a pleasure in looking at her, as he had in examining rare flowers, or in seeing pleasant landscapes. Both the ladies liked William: it was their delight to lend him books, to give him plants; and they preferred his conversation far before that of many coarse, hard, pretentious people, immeasurably higher in station.

"Who was speaking, William, when you came out?" asked Shirley.

"A gentleman ye set a deal of store on, Miss Shirley—Mr. Donne."

"You look knowing, William. How did you find out my regard for Mr. Donne?"

"Ay, Miss Shirley, there's a gleg light i' your een sometimes which betrays you. You look raight down scornful sometimes, when Mr. Donne is by."

"Do you like him yourself, William?"

"Me? I'm stalled o' t' Curates, and so is t' wife: they've no manners; they talk to poor folk fair as if they thought they were beneath them. They're allus magnifying their office: it is a pity but their office could magnify them; but it does nought o' t' soart. I fair hate pride."

"But you are proud in your own way yourself," interposed Caroline: "you are what you call house-

proud; you like to have everything handsome about you: sometimes you look as if you were almost too proud to take your wages. When you were out of work, you were too proud to get anything on credit; but for your children, I believe you would rather have starved than gone to the shops without money; and when I wanted to give you something, what a difficulty I had in making you take it!"

"It is partly true, Miss Caroline: ony day I'd rather give than take, especially from sich as ye. Look at t' difference between us: ye're a little, young, slender lass, and I'm a great, strong man: I'm rather more nor twice your age. It is not *my* part then, I think, to tak' fro' *ye*—to be under obligations (as they say) to *ye*; and that day ye came to our house, and called me to t' door, and offered me five shillings, which I doubt ye could ill spare,—for ye've no fortin', I know,—that day I war fair a rebel—a radical—an insurrectionist; and *ye* made me so. I thought it shameful that, willing and able as I was to work, I suld be i' such a condition that a young cratur about the age o' my own eldest lass suld think it needful to come and offer me her bit o' brass."

"I suppose you were angry with me, William?"

"I almost was, in a way; but I forgave ye varry soon: ye meant well. Ay, *I am* proud, and so are *ye*; but your pride and mine is t' raight mak'—what we call i' Yorkshire 'clean pride,'—such as Mr. Malone and Mr. Donne knows nought about: theirs

is mucky pride. Now, I shall teach my lasses to be as proud as Miss Shirley there, and my lads to be as proud as myseln; but I dare ony o' 'em to be like t' Curates: I'd lick little Michael, if I seed him show any signs o' that feeling."

"What is the difference, William?"

"Ye know t' difference weel enow, but ye want me to get a gate o' talking. Mr. Malone and Mr. Donne is almost too proud to do aught for theirseln'; *we* are almost too proud to let anybody do aught for us. T' Curates can hardly bide to speak a civil word to them they think beneath them; *we* can hardly bide to tak' an uncivil word fro' them that thinks themsel'n aboon us."

"Now, William, be humble enough to tell me truly how you are getting on in the world? Are you well off?"

"Miss Shirley—I am vary well off. Since I got into t' gardening line, wi' Mr. Yorke's help, and since Mr. Hall (another o' t' raight sort) helped my wife to set up a bit of a shop, I've nought to complain of. My family has plenty to eat and plenty to wear: my pride makes me find means to save an odd pound now and then against rainy days; for I think I'd die afore I'd come to t' parish: and me and mine is content; but th' neighbours is poor yet: I see a great deal of distress."

"And, consequently, there is still discontent, I suppose?" inquired Miss Keeldar.

"*Consequently*—ye say right—*consequently*. In

course, starving folk cannot be satisfied or settled folk. The country's not in a safe condition;—I'll say so mich!"

"But what can be done? What more can I do, for instance?"

"Do?—ye can do naught mich, poor young lass! Ye've gi'en your brass: ye've done well. If ye could transport your tenant, Mr. Moore, to Botany Bay, ye'd happen do better. Folks hate him."

"William, for shame!" exclaimed Caroline, warmly. "If folks *do* hate him, it is to their disgrace, not his. Mr. Moore himself hates nobody; he only wants to do his duty, and maintain his rights: you are wrong to talk so!"

"I talk as I think. He has a cold, unfeeling heart, yond' Moore."

"But," interposed Shirley, "supposing Moore was driven from the country, and his mill razed to the ground, would people have more work?"

"They'd have less. I know that, and they know that; and there is many an honest lad driven desperate by the certainty that whichever way he turns, he cannot better himself, and there is dishonest men plenty to guide them to the devil: scoundrels that reckons to be the 'people's friends,' and that knows naught about the people, and is as insincere as Lucifer. I've lived aboon forty year in the world, and I believe that 'the people' will never have any true friends but theirsel'n, and them two or three good folk i' different stations, that is

friends to all the world. Human natur', taking it i' th' lump, is naught but selfishness. It is but excessive few; it is but just an exception here and there, now and then, sich as ye two young 'uns and me, that being in a different sphere, can understand t' one t' other, and be friends wi' out slavishness o' one hand, or pride o' t' other. Them that reckons to be friends to a lower class than their own fro' political motives is never to be trusted: they always try to make their inferiors tools. For my own part, I will neither be patronized nor misled for no man's pleasure. I've had overtures made to me lately that I saw were treacherous, and I flung 'em back i' the faces o' them that offered 'em."

"You won't tell us what overtures?"

"I will not: it would do no good; it would mak' no difference: them they concerned can look after theirsel'n."

"Ay, we'se look after wersel'n," said another voice. Joe Scott had sauntered forth from the church to get a breath of fresh air, and there he stood.

"I'll warrant *ye*, Joe," observed William, smiling.

"And I'll warrant my maister," was the answer.

"Young ladies," continued Joe, assuming a lordly air, "ye'd better go into th' house."

"I wonder what for?" inquired Shirley, to whom the overlooker's somewhat pragmatical manners were familiar, and who was often at war with him; for Joe, holding supercilious theories about women in

general, resented greatly, in his secret soul, the fact of his master and his master's mill being, in a manner, under petticoat government, and had felt as wormwood and gall, certain business-visits of the heiress to the Hollow's counting-house.

“ Because there is naught agate that fits women to be consarned in.”

“ Indeed! There is prayer and preaching agate in that church; are we not concerned in that?”

“ Ye have been present neither at the prayer nor preaching, ma'am, if I have observed aright. What I alluded to was politics: William Farren, here, was touching on that subject, if I'm not mista'en.”

“ Well, what then? Politics are our habitual study, Joe. Do you know I see a newspaper every day, and two of a Sunday?”

“ I should think you'll read the marriages, probably, Miss, and the murders, and the accidents, and sich like?”

“ I read the leading articles, Joe, and the foreign intelligence, and I look over the market prices: in short, I read just what gentlemen read.”

Joe looked as if he thought this talk was like the chattering of a pie. He replied to it, by a disdainful silence.

“ Joe,” continued Miss Keeldar, “ I never yet could ascertain properly, whether you are a Whig or a Tory: pray which party has the honour of your alliance?”

“ It is rayther difficult to explain where you are

sure not to be understood," was Joe's haughty response; "but, as to being a Tory, I'd as soon be an old woman, or a young one, which is a more flimsier article still. It is the Tories that carries on the war and ruins trade; and, if I be of any party—though political parties is all nonsense—I'm of that which is most favourable to peace, and, by consequence, to the mercantile interests of this here land."

"So am I, Joe," replied Shirley, who had rather a pleasure in teasing the overlooker, by persisting in talking on subjects with which he opined she—as a woman—had no right to meddle: "partly, at least. I have rather a leaning to the agricultural interest, too; as good reason is, seeing that I don't desire England to be under the feet of France, and that if a share of my income comes from Hollow's mill, a larger share comes from the landed estate around it. It would not do to take any measures injurious to the farmers, Joe, I think?"

"The dews at this hour is unwholesome for females," observed Joe.

"If you make that remark out of interest in me, I have merely to assure you that I am impervious to cold. I should not mind taking my turn to watch the mill one of these summer nights, armed with your musket, Joe."

Joe Scott's chin was always rather prominent: he poked it out, at this speech, some inches further than usual.

"But—to go back to my sheep," she proceeded—

“ clothier and mill-owner, as I am, besides farmer, I cannot get out of my head a certain idea that we manufacturers and persons of business are sometimes a little—a *very little* selfish and short-sighted in our views, and rather *too* regardless of human suffering, rather heartless in our pursuit of gain: don’t you agree with me, Joe?”

“ I cannot argue, where I cannot be comprehended,” was again the answer.

“ Man of mystery! Your master will argue with me sometimes, Joe: he is not so stiff as you are.”

“ May be not: we’ve all our own ways.”

“ Joe, do you seriously think all the wisdom in the world is lodged in male skulls?”

“ I think that women are a kittle and a froward generation; and I’ve a great respect for the doctrines delivered in the second chapter of St. Paul’s first Epistle to Timothy.”

“ What doctrines, Joe?”

“ Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man; but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve.”

“ What has that to do with the business?” interjected Shirley: “ that smacks of rights of primogeniture. I’ll bring it up to Mr. Yorke the first time he inveighs against those rights.”

“ And,” continued Joe Scott, “ Adam was not deceived; but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression.”

“ More shame to Adam to sin with his eyes open !” cried Miss Keeldar. “ To confess the honest truth, Joe, I never was easy in my mind concerning that chapter : it puzzles me.”

“ It is very plain, Miss : he that runs may read.”

“ He may read it in his own fashion,” remarked Caroline, now joining in the dialogue for the first time. “ You allow the right of private judgment, I suppose, Joe ?”

“ My certy, that I do ! I allow and claim it for every line of the holy Book.”

“ Women may exercise it as well as men ?”

“ Nay : women is to take their husbands’ opinion, both in politics and religion : it’s wholesomest for them.”

“ Oh ! oh !” exclaimed both Shirley and Caroline.

“ To be sure ; no doubt on’t,” persisted the stubborn overlooker.

“ Consider yourself groaned down, and cried shame over, for such a stupid observation,” said Miss Keeldar. “ You might as well say, men are to take the opinions of their priests without examination. Of what value would a religion so adopted be ? It would be mere blind, besotted superstition.”

“ And what is *your* reading, Miss Helstone, o’ these words o’ St. Paul’s ?”

“ Hem ! I—I account for them in this way : he wrote that chapter for a particular congregation of Christians, under peculiar circumstances ; and besides, I dare say, if I could read the original Greek,

I should find that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misapprehended altogether. It would be possible, I doubt not, with a little ingenuity, to give the passage quite a contrary turn; to make it say, 'Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection;—'it is permitted to a woman to teach and to exercise authority as much as may be. Man, meantime, cannot do better than hold his peace,' and so on."

"That willn't wash, Miss."

"I dare say it will. My notions are dyed in faster colours than yours, Joe. Mr. Scott, you are a thoroughly dogmatical person, and always were: I like William better than you."

"Joe is well enough in his own house," said Shirley: "I have seen him as quiet as a lamb at home. There is not a better nor a kinder husband in Briarfield. He does not dogmatize to his wife."

"My wife is a hard-working, plain woman: time and trouble has ta'en all the conceit out of her; but that is not the case with you, young Misses. And then you reckon to have so much knowledge; and i' my thoughts it's only superficial sort o' vanities you're acquainted with. I can tell—happen a year sin'—one day Miss Caroline coming into our counting-house when I war packing up summut behind t' great desk, and she didn't see me, and she brought a slate wi' a sum on it to t' maister: it war only a bit of a sum in practice, that our Harry would have settled i' two minutes. She couldn't do it;

Mr. Moore had to show her how; and when he did show her, she couldn't understand him."

"Nonsense, Joe!"

"Nay, it's no nonsense: and Miss Shirley, there, reckons to hearken to t' maister when he's talking ower trade, so attentive like, as if she followed him word for word, and all war as clear as a lady's looking-glass to her een; and all t' while she's peep-
ing and peeping out o' t' window to see if t' mare stands quiet; and then looking at a bit of a splash on her riding-skirt; and then glancing glegly round at wer counting-house cobwebs and dust, and thinking what mucky folk we are, and what a grand ride she'll have just i' now ower Nunnely-common. She hears no more o' Mr. Moore's talk nor if he spake Hebrew."

"Joe, you are a real slanderer. I would give you your answer, only the people are coming out of church: we must leave you. Man of prejudice, good-bye: William, good-bye. Children, come up to Fieldhead to-morrow, and you shall choose what you like best out of Mrs. Gill's store-room."

CHAPTER VIII.

A SUMMER NIGHT.

THE hour was now that of dusk. A clear air favoured the kindling of the stars.

“There will be just light enough to show me the way home,” said Miss Keeldar, as she prepared to take leave of Caroline at the Rectory garden-door.

“You must not go alone, Shirley. Fanny shall accompany you.”

“That she shall not. Of what need I be afraid in my own parish? I would walk from Fieldhead to the church any fine mid-summer night, three hours later than this, for the mere pleasure of seeing the stars, and the chance of meeting a fairy.”

“But just wait till the crowd is cleared away.”

“Agreed. There are the five Misses Armitage streaming by. Here comes Mrs. Sykes’s phaeton, Mr. Wynne’s close carriage, Mrs. Birtwhistle’s car: I don’t wish to go through the ceremony of bidding them all good-bye, so we will step into the garden and take shelter amongst the laburnums for an instant.”

The Rectors, their Curates and their Churchwardens, now issued from the church-porch. There was a great confabulation, shaking of hands, congratulation on speeches, recommendation to be careful of the night air, &c. By degrees the throng dispersed; the carriages drove off. Miss Keeldar was just emerging from her flowery refuge, when Mr. Helstone entered the garden and met her.

“Oh! I want you!” he said: “I was afraid you were already gone. Caroline, come here!”

Caroline came, expecting as Shirley did, a lecture on not having been visible at church. Other subjects, however, occupied the Rector’s mind.

“I shall not sleep at home to-night,” he continued. “I have just met with an old friend, and promised to accompany him. I shall return probably about noon to-morrow. Thomas, the clerk, is engaged, and I cannot get him to sleep in the house, as I usually do when I am absent for a night; now ——”

“Now,” interrupted Shirley, “you want me as a gentleman—the first gentleman in Briarfield, in short, to supply your place, be master of the Rectory, and guardian of your niece and maids while you are away?”

“Exactly, captain: I thought the post would suit you. Will you favour Caroline so far as to be her guest for one night? Will you stay here instead of going back to Fieldhead?”

“And what will Mrs. Pryor do? She expects me home.”

“I will send her word. Come, make up your mind to stay. It grows late; the dew falls heavily: you and Caroline will enjoy each other’s society I doubt not.”

“I promise you then to stay with Caroline,” replied Shirley. “As you say, we shall enjoy each other’s society: we will not be separated to-night. Now, rejoin your old friend, and fear nothing for us.”

“If there should chance to be any disturbance in the night, captain—if you should hear the picking of a lock, the cutting out of a pane of glass, a stealthy tread of steps about the house—(and I need not fear to tell *you*, who bear a well-tempered, mettlesome heart under your girl’s ribbon-sash, that such little incidents are very possible in the present time), what would you do?”

“Don’t know—faint, perhaps—fall down, and have to be picked up again. But, doctor, if you assign me the post of honour, you must give me arms. What weapons are there in your stronghold?”

“You could not wield a sword?”

“No; I could manage the carving-knife better.”

“You will find a good one in the dining-room side-board: a lady’s knife, light to handle, and as sharp-pointed as a poniard.”

“It will suit Caroline; but you must give me a brace of pistols: I know you have pistols.”

“I have two pairs; one pair I can place at your

disposal. You will find them suspended over the mantelpiece of my study in cloth cases."

"Loaded?"

"Yes, but not on the cock. Cock them before you go to bed. It is paying you a great compliment, captain, to lend you these: were you one of the awkward squad you should not have them."

"I will take care. You need delay no longer, Mr. Helstone: you may go now. He is gracious to me to lend me his pistols," she remarked, as the Rector passed out at the garden-gate, "But come, Lina," she continued; "let us go in and have some supper: I was too much vexed at tea with the vicinage of Mr. Sam Wynne to be able to eat, and now I am really hungry."

Entering the house, they repaired to the darkened dining-room, through the open windows of which apartment stole the evening air, bearing the perfume of flowers from the garden, the very distant sound of far-retreating steps from the road, and a soft, vague murmur, whose origin Caroline explained by the remark, uttered as she stood listening at the casement:

"Shirley, I hear the beck in the Hollow."

Then she rung the bell, asked for a candle and some bread and milk—Miss Keeldar's usual supper and her own. Fanny, when she brought in the tray, would have closed the windows and the shutters, but was requested to desist for the present: the twilight was too calm, its breath too balmy to

be yet excluded. They took their meal in silence: Caroline rose once, to remove to the window-sill a glass of flowers which stood on the side-board; the exhalation from the blossoms being somewhat too powerful for the sultry room: in returning, she half opened a drawer, and took from it something that glittered clear and keen in her hand.

“You assigned this to me, then, Shirley—did you? It is bright, keen-edged, finely-tapered: it is dangerous-looking. I never yet felt the impulse which could move me to direct this against a fellow-creature. It is difficult to fancy what circumstances could nerve my arm to strike home with this long knife.”

“I should hate to do it,” replied Shirley; “but I think I could do it, if goaded by certain exigencies which I can imagine.” And Miss Keeldar quietly sipped her glass of new milk, looking somewhat thoughtful, and a little pale: though, indeed, when did she not look pale? She was never florid.

The milk sipped and the bread eaten, Fanny was again summoned: she and Eliza were recommended to go to bed, which they were quite willing to do, being weary of the day’s exertions, of much cutting of currant-buns, and filling of urns and teapots, and running backwards and forwards with trays. Ere long the maids’ chamber-door was heard to close: Caroline took a candle, and went quietly all over the house, seeing that every window was fast and every door barred. She did not even evade the haunted

back-kitchen, nor the vault-like cellars. These visited, she returned.

“There is neither spirit nor flesh in the house at present,” she said, “which should not be there. It is now near eleven o’clock, fully bed-time, yet I would rather sit up a little longer, if you do not object, Shirley. Here,” she continued, “I have brought the brace of pistols from my uncle’s study: you may examine them at your leisure.”

She placed them on the table before her friend.

“Why would you rather sit up longer?” asked Miss Keeldar, taking up the firearms, examining them, and again laying them down.

“Because I have a strange, excited feeling in my heart.”

“So have I.”

“Is this state of sleeplessness and restlessness caused by something electrical in the air, I wonder?”

“No: the sky is clear, the stars numberless; it is a fine night.”

“But very still. I hear the water fret over its stony bed in Hollow’s Copse as distinctly as if it ran below the churchyard-wall.”

“I am glad it is so still a night: a moaning wind or rushing rain would vex me to fever just now.”

“Why, Shirley?”

“Because it would baffle my efforts to listen.”

“Do you listen towards the Hollow?”

“Yes; it is the only quarter whence we can hear a sound just now.”

“The only one, Shirley.”

They both sat near the window, and both leaned their arms on the sill, and both inclined their heads towards the open lattice. They saw each other's young faces by the starlight, and that dim, June twilight which does not wholly fade from the west till dawn begins to break in the east.

“Mr. Helstone thinks we have no idea which way he is gone,” murmured Miss Keeldar, “nor on what errand, nor with what expectations, nor how prepared; but I guess much—do not you?”

“I guess something.”

“All those gentlemen—your cousin Moore included—think that you and I are now asleep in our beds, unconscious.”

“Caring nothing about them—hoping and fearing nothing for them,” added Caroline.

Both kept silence for full half an hour. The night was silent, too; only the church-clock measured its course by quarters. Some words were interchanged about the chill of the air: they wrapped their scarves closer round them, resumed their bonnets, which they had removed, and again watched.

Towards midnight, the teasing, monotonous bark of the house-dog disturbed the quietude of their vigil. Caroline rose, and made her way noiselessly through the dark passages to the kitchen, intending to appease him with a piece of bread: she succeeded. On returning to the dining-room, she found it all dark, Miss Keeldar having extinguished the candle:

the outline of her shape was visible near the still open window, leaning out. Miss Helstone asked no questions: she stole to her side. The dog recommenced barking furiously; suddenly he stopped, and seemed to listen. The occupants of the dining-room listened too, and not merely now to the flow of the mill-stream: there was a nearer, though a muffled sound on the road below the churchyard; a measured, beating, approaching sound; a dull tramp of marching feet.

It drew near. Those who listened, by degrees, comprehended its extent. It was not the tread of two, nor of a dozen, nor of a score of men: it was the tread of hundreds. They could see nothing: the high shrubs of the garden formed a leafy screen between them and the road. To hear, however, was not enough; and this they felt as the troop trode forwards, and seemed actually passing the Rectory. They felt it more when a human voice—though that voice spoke but one word—broke the hush of the night.

“Halt!”

A halt followed: the march was arrested. Then came a low conference, of which no word was distinguishable from the dining-room.

“We *must* hear this,” said Shirley.

She turned, took her pistols from the table, silently passed out through the middle window of the dining-room, which was, in fact, a glass door, stole down the walk to the garden-wall, and stood

listening under the lilacs. Caroline would not have quitted the house had she been alone, but where Shirley went she would go. She glanced at the weapon on the side-board, but left it behind her, and presently stood at her friend's side. They dared not look over the wall, for fear of being seen: they were obliged to crouch behind it: they heard these words:—

“It looks a rambling old building. Who lives in it besides the damned parson?”

“Only three women: his niece and two servants.”

“Do you know where they sleep?”

“The lasses behind: the niece in a front room.”

“And Helstone?”

“Yonder is his chamber. He uses burning a light; but I see none now.”

“Where would you get in?”

“If I were ordered to do his job—and he deserves it—I'd try yond' long window: it opens to the dining-room: I could grope my way up-stairs, and I know his chamber.”

“How would you manage about the women folk?”

“Let 'em alone, except they shrieked, and then I'd soon quieten 'em. I could wish to find the old chap asleep: if he waked, he'd be dangerous.”

“Has he arms?”

“Fire-arms, allus,—and allus loadened.”

“Then you're a fool to stop us here; a shot would give the alarm: Moore would be on us before

we could turn round. We should miss our main object."

"You might go on, I tell you. I'd engage Helstone alone."

A pause. One of the party dropped some weapon which rang on the stone causeway: at this sound the Rectory dog barked again furiously—fiercely.

"That spoils all!" said the voice; "he'll awake: a noise like that might rouse the dead. You did not say there was a dog. Damn you! Forward!"

Forward they went,—tramp, tramp,—with mustering, manifold, slow-filing tread. They were gone.

Shirley stood erect; looked over the wall, along the road.

"Not a soul remains," she said.

She stood and mused. "Thank God!" was the next observation.

Caroline repeated the ejaculation, not in so steady a tone: she was trembling much; her heart was beating fast and thick; her face was cold; her forehead damp.

"Thank God for us!" she reiterated; "but what will happen elsewhere? They have passed us by that they may make sure of others."

"They have done well," returned Shirley, with composure: "the others will defend themselves,—they can do it,—they are prepared for them: with us it is otherwise. My finger was on the trigger of this pistol. I was quite ready to give that man, if he had entered, such a greeting as he little calculated

on; but behind him followed three hundred: I had neither three hundred hands nor three hundred weapons. I could not have effectually protected either you, myself, or the two poor women asleep under that roof; therefore I again earnestly thank God for insult and peril escaped."

After a second pause, she continued: "What is it my duty and wisdom to do next? Not to stay here inactive, I am glad to say, but of course to walk over to the Hollow."

"To the Hollow, Shirley?"

"To the Hollow. Will you go with me?"

"Where those men are gone?"

"They have taken the highway: we should not encounter them: the road over the fields is as safe, silent and solitary as a path through the air would be. Will you go?"

"Yes," was the answer, given mechanically, not because the speaker wished, or was prepared to go; or, indeed, was otherwise than scared at the prospect of going, but because she felt she could not abandon Shirley.

"Then we must fasten up these windows, and leave all as secure as we can behind us. Do you know what we are going for, Cary?"

"Yes—no—because you wish it."

"Is that all? And are you so obedient to a mere caprice of mine? What a docile wife you would make to a stern husband. The moon's face is not whiter than yours at this moment; and the

aspen at the gate does not tremble more than your busy fingers; and so, tractable and terror-struck, and dismayed and devoted, you would follow me into the thick of real danger! Cary, let me give your fidelity a motive: we are going for Moore's sake; to see if we can be of use to him: to make an effort to warn him of what is coming."

"To be sure! I am a blind, weak fool, and you are acute and sensible, Shirley! I will go with you! I will gladly go with you!"

"I do not doubt it. You would die blindly and meekly for me, but you would intelligently and gladly die for Moore: but in truth there is no question of death to-night,—we run no risk at all."

Caroline rapidly closed shutter and lattice. "Do not fear that I shall not have breath to run as fast as you can possibly run, Shirley. Take my hand: let us go straight across the fields."

"But you cannot climb walls?"

"To-night I can."

"You are afraid of hedges, and the beck which we shall be forced to cross?"

"I can cross it."

They started: they ran. Many a wall checked but did not baffle them. Shirley was surefooted and agile: she could spring like a deer when she chose. Caroline, more timid, and less dexterous, fell once or twice, and bruised herself; but she rose again directly, saying she was not hurt. A quickset hedge bounded the last field: they lost time in seeking a gap in it:

the aperture, when found, was narrow, but they worked their way through : the long hair, the tender skin, the silks and the muslins suffered ; but what was chiefly regretted was the impediment this difficulty had caused to speed. On the other side they met the beck, flowing deep in a rough bed : at this point a narrow plank formed the only bridge across it. Shirley had trodden the plank successfully and fearlessly many a time before : Caroline had never yet dared to risk the transit.

“ I will carry you across,” said Miss Keeldar : “ you are light, and I am not weak : let me try.”

“ If I fall in, you may fish me out,” was the answer, as a grateful squeeze compressed her hand. Caroline, without pausing, trod forward on the trembling plank as if it were a continuation of the firm turf : Shirley, who followed, did not cross it more resolutely or safely. In their present humour, on their present errand, a strong and foaming channel would have been a barrier to neither. At the moment they were above the control either of fire or water : all Stilbro' Moor, alight and alow with bonfires, would not have stopped them, nor would Calder or Aire thundering in flood. Yet one sound made them pause. Scarce had they set foot on the solid opposite bank, when a shot split the air from the north. One second lapsed. Further off, burst a like note in the south. Within the space of three minutes, similar signals boomed in the east and west.

“ I thought we were dead at the first explosion,” observed Shirley, drawing a long breath. “ I felt myself hit in the temples, and I concluded your heart was pierced ; but the reiterated voice was an explanation : those are signals—it is their way—the attack must be near. We should have had wings : our feet have not borne us swiftly enough.”

A portion of the copse was now to clear : when they emerged from it, the mill lay just below them : they could look down upon the buildings, the yard ; they could see the road beyond. And the first glance in that direction told Shirley she was right in her conjecture : they were already too late to give warning : it had taken more time than they calculated on to overcome the various obstacles which embarrassed the short cut across the fields.

The road, which should have been white, was dark with a moving mass : the rioters were assembled in front of the closed yard gates, and a single figure stood within, apparently addressing them : the mill itself was perfectly black and still ; there was neither life, light, nor motion around it.

“ Surely he is prepared : surely that is not Moore meeting them alone !” whispered Shirley.

“ It is—we must go to him ! I *will* go to him.”

“ *That* you will not.”

“ Why did I come, then ? I came only for him. I shall join him.”

“ Fortunately, it is out of your power : there is no entrance to the yard.”

“ There *is* a small entrance at the back, besides the gates in front: it opens by a secret method which I know—I will try it.”

“ Not with my leave.”

Miss Keeldar clasped her round the waist with both arms and held her back. “ Not one step shall you stir,” she went on authoritatively. “ At this moment, Moore would be both shocked and embarrassed, if he saw either you or me. Men never want women near them in time of real danger.”

“ I would not trouble—I would help him,” was the reply.

“ How? By inspiring him with heroism? Pooh! These are not the days of chivalry: it is not a tilt at a tournament we are going to behold, but a struggle about money, and food, and life.”

“ It is natural that I should be at his side.”

“ As queen of his heart? His mill is his lady-love, Cary! Backed by his factory and his frames, he has all the encouragement he wants or can know. It is not for love or beauty, but for ledger and broad-cloth, he is going to break a spear. Don't be sentimental; Robert is not so.”

“ I *could* help him—I *will* seek him.”

“ Off then—I let you go—seek Moore: you'll not find him.”

She loosened her hold. Caroline sped like levelled shaft from bent bow; after her rang a jesting, gibing laugh. “ Look well there is no mistake!” was the warning given.

But there *was* a mistake. Miss Helstone paused, hesitated, gazed. The figure had suddenly retreated from the gate, and was running back hastily to the mill.

“Make haste, Lina!” cried Shirley: “meet him before he enters.”

Caroline slowly returned. “It is not Robert,” she said: “it has neither his height, form, nor bearing.”

“I saw it was not Robert when I let you go. How could you imagine it? It is a shabby little figure of a private soldier: they had posted him as sentinel. He is safe in the mill now: I saw the door open and admit him. My mind grows easier; Robert is prepared: our warning would have been superfluous, and now I am thankful we came too late to give it: it has saved us the trouble of a scene. How fine to have entered the counting-house ‘*toute éperdue*,’ and to have found oneself in presence of Messrs. Armitage and Ramsden smoking, Malone swaggering, your uncle sneering, Mr. Sykes sipping a cordial, and Moore himself in his cold man-of-business vein: I am glad we missed it all.”

“I wonder if there are many in the mill, Shirley?”

“Plenty to defend it. The soldiers we have twice seen to-day were going there no doubt, and the group we noticed surrounding your cousin in the fields will be with him.”

“What are they doing now, Shirley? What is that noise?”

“Hatchets and crow-bars against the yard-gates: they are forcing them. Are you afraid?”

“No; but my heart throbs fast; I have a difficulty in standing: I will sit down. Do you feel unmoved?”

“Hardly that—but I am glad I came: we shall see what transpires with our own eyes: we are here on the spot, and none know it. Instead of amazing the curate, the clothier, and the corn-dealer with a romantic rush on the stage, we stand alone with the friendly night, its mute stars, and these whispering trees, whose report our friends will not come to gather.”

“Shirley—Shirley, the gates are down! That crash was like the felling of great trees. Now they are pouring through. They will break down the mill-doors as they have broken the gate: what can Robert do against so many? Would to God, I were a little nearer him—could hear him speak—could speak to him! With my will—my longing to serve him—I could not be a useless burden in his way: I could be turned to some account.”

“They come on!” cried Shirley. “How steadily they march in! There is discipline in their ranks—I will not say there is courage: hundreds against tens are no proof of that quality; but” (she dropped her voice) “there is suffering and desperation enough amongst them—these goads will urge them forwards.”

“Forwards against Robert—and they hate him.

Shirley, is there much danger they will win the day?"

"We shall see. Moore and Helstone are of 'earth's first blood' — no bunglers — no cravens ——"

A crash—smash—shiver—stopped their whispers. A simultaneously-hurled volley of stones had saluted the broad front of the mill, with all its windows; and now every pane of every lattice, lay in shattered and pounded fragments. A yell followed this demonstration—a rioters' yell—a North-of-England—a Yorkshire—a West-Riding—a West-Riding-clothing-district-of-Yorkshire rioters' yell. You never heard that sound, perhaps, reader? So much the better for your ears—perhaps for your heart; since, if it rends the air in hate to yourself, or to the men or principles you approve, the interests to which you wish well, Wrath wakens to the cry of Hate: the Lion shakes his main, and rises to the howl of the Hyæna: Caste stands up, ireful, against Caste; and the indignant, wronged spirit of the Middle Rank bears down in zeal and scorn on the famished and furious mass of the Operative Class. It is difficult to be tolerant—difficult to be just—in such moments.

Caroline rose; Shirley put her arm round her: they stood together as still as the straight stems of two trees. That yell was a long one, and when it ceased, the night was yet full of the swaying and murmuring of a crowd.

"What next?" was the question of the listeners.

“ Hatchets and crow-bars against the yard-gates : they are forcing them. Are you afraid ? ”

“ No ; but my heart throbs fast ; I have a difficulty in standing : I will sit down. Do you feel unmoved ? ”

“ Hardly that—but I am glad I came : we shall see what transpires with our own eyes : we are here on the spot, and none know it. Instead of amazing the curate, the clothier, and the corn-dealer with a romantic rush on the stage, we stand alone with the friendly night, its mute stars, and these whispering trees, whose report our friends will not come to gather.”

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"What next?" was the question of the listeners.

Nothing came yet. The mill remained mute as a mausoleum.

“He *cannot* be alone!” whispered Caroline.

“I would stake all I have, that he is as little alone as he is alarmed,” responded Shirley.

Shots were discharged by the rioters. Had the defenders waited for this signal? It seemed so. The hitherto inert and passive mill woke: fire flashed from its empty window-frames; a volley of musketry pealed sharp through the Hollow.

“Moore speaks at last!” said Shirley, “and he seems to have the gift of tongues; that was not a single voice.”

“He has been forbearing; no one can accuse him of rashness,” alleged Caroline: “their discharge preceded his; they broke his gates and his windows; they fired at his garrison before he repelled them.”

What was going on now? It seemed difficult, in the darkness, to distinguish, but something terrible, a still-renewing tumult, was obvious: fierce attacks, desperate repulses; the mill-yard, the mill itself, was full of battle-movement: there was scarcely any cessation now of the discharge of firearms; and there was struggling, rushing, trampling, and shouting between. The aim of the assailants seemed to be to enter the mill, that of the defendants to beat them off. They heard the rebel leader cry, “To the back, lads!” They heard a voice retort, “Come round, we will meet you!”

“To the counting-house!” was the order again.

“Welcome!—We shall have you there!” was the response. And accordingly, the fiercest blaze that had yet glowed, the loudest rattle that had yet been heard, burst from the counting-house front, when the mass of rioters rushed up to it.

The voice that had spoken was Moore’s own voice. They could tell by its tones that his soul was now warm with the conflict: they could guess that the fighting animal was roused in every one of those men there struggling together, and was for the time quite paramount above the rational human being. Both the girls felt their faces glow and their pulses throb: both knew they would do no good by rushing down into the *melée*: they desired neither to deal nor to receive blows; but they could not have run away—Caroline no more than Shirley; they could not have fainted; they could not have taken their eyes from the dim, terrible scene—from the mass of cloud, of smoke—the musket-lightning—for the world.

“How and when would it end?” was the demand throbbing in their throbbing pulses. “Would a juncture arise in which they could be useful?” was what they waited to see; for, though Shirley put off their too-late arrival with a jest, and was ever ready to satirize her own or any other person’s enthusiasm, she would have given a farm of her best land for a chance of rendering good service.

The chance was not vouchsafed her; the looked-for juncture never came: it was not likely. Moore had expected this attack for days, perhaps weeks: he

was prepared for it at every point. He had fortified and garrisoned his mill, which in itself was a strong building: he was a cool, brave man: he stood to the defence with unflinching firmness; those who were with him caught his spirit, and copied his demeanour. The rioters had never been so met before. At other mills they had attacked, they had found no resistance; an organized, resolute defence was what they never dreamed of encountering. When their leaders saw the steady fire kept up from the mill, witnessed the composure and determination of its owner, heard themselves coolly defied and invited on to death, and beheld their men falling wounded round them, they felt that nothing was to be done here. In haste, they mustered their forces, drew them away from the building: a roll was called over, in which the men answered to figures instead of names: they dispersed wide over the fields, leaving silence and ruin behind them. The attack, from its commencement to its termination, had not occupied an hour.

Day was by this time approaching: the west was dim, the east beginning to gleam. It would have seemed that the girls who had watched this conflict would now wish to hasten to the victors, on whose side all their interest had been enlisted; but they only very cautiously approached the now battered mill, and, when suddenly a number of soldiers and gentlemen appeared at the great door opening into the yard, they quickly stepped aside into a shed, the

deposit of old iron and timber, whence they could see without being seen.

It was no cheering spectacle: these premises were now a mere blot of desolation on the fresh front of the summer-dawn. All the copse up the Hollow was shady and dewy, the hill at its head was green; but just here in the centre of the sweet glen, Discord, broken loose in the night from control, had beaten the ground with his stamping hoofs, and left it waste and pulverized. The mill yawned all ruinous with unglazed frames; the yard was thickly bestrewn with stones and brickbats, and, close under the mill, with the glittering fragments of the shattered windows; muskets and other weapons lay here and there; more than one deep crimson stain was visible on the gravel: a human body lay quiet on its face near the gates; and five or six wounded men writhed and moaned in the bloody dust.

Miss Keeldar's countenance changed at this view: it was the aftertaste of the battle, death and pain replacing excitement and exertion: it was the blackness the bright fire leaves when its blaze is sunk, its warmth failed, and its glow faded.

"This is what I wished to prevent," she said, in a voice whose cadence betrayed the altered impulse of her heart.

"But you could not prevent it; you did your best; it was in vain," said Caroline, comfortingly. "Don't grieve, Shirley."

"I am sorry for those poor fellows," was the

answer, while the spark in her glance dissolved to dew. "Are any within the mill hurt, I wonder? Is that your uncle?"

"It is, and there is Mr. Malone, and, oh Shirley! There is Robert!"

"Well," (resuming her former tone), "don't squeeze your fingers quite into my hand: I see, there is nothing wonderful in that. We knew he, at least, was here, whoever might be absent."

"He is coming here toward us, Shirley!"

"Towards the pump, that is to say, for the purpose of washing his hands and his forehead, which has got a scratch, I perceive."

"He bleeds, Shirley: don't hold me; I must go."

"Not a step."

"He is hurt, Shirley!"

"Fiddlestick!"

"But I *must* go to him: I wish to go so much: I cannot bear to be restrained."

"What for?"

"To speak to him, to ask how he is, and what I can do for him?"

"To teaze and annoy him; to make a spectacle of yourself and him before those soldiers, Mr. Malone, your uncle, et cetera. Would he like it think you? Would you like to remember it a week hence?"

"Am I always to be curbed and kept down?" demanded Caroline, a little passionately.

“For his sake, yes. And still more for your own. I tell you, if you shewed yourself now, you would repent it an hour hence, and so would Robert.”

“You think he would not like it, Shirley?”

“Far less than he would like our stopping him to say good-night, which you were so sore about.”

“But that was all play; there was no danger.”

“And this is serious work: he must be unmolested.”

“I only wished to go to him because he is my cousin,—you understand?”

“I quite understand. But now, watch him. He has bathed his forehead, and the blood has ceased trickling; his hurt is really a mere graze: I can see it from hence: he is going to look after the wounded men.”

Accordingly Mr. Moore and Mr. Helstone went round the yard, examining each prostrate form. They then gave directions to have the wounded taken up and carried into the mill. This duty being performed, Joe Scott was ordered to saddle his master's horse, and Mr. Helstone's pony, and the two gentlemen rode away full gallop, to seek surgical aid in different directions.

Caroline was not yet pacified.

“Shirley, Shirley, I should have liked to speak one word to him before he went,” she murmured, while the tears gathered glittering in her eyes.

“Why do you cry, Lina?” asked Miss Keeldar a

little sternly. "You ought to be glad instead of sorry. Robert has escaped any serious harm; he is victorious: he has been cool and brave in combat; he is now considerate in triumph: is this a time—are these causes for weeping?"

"You do not know what I have in my heart," pleaded the other: "what pain, what distraction; nor whence it arises. I can understand that you should exult in Robert's greatness and goodness; so do I, in one sense, but, in another, I feel *so* miserable. I am too far removed from him: I used to be nearer. Let me alone, Shirley: do let me cry a few minutes; it relieves me."

Miss Keeldar, feeling her tremble in every limb, ceased to expostulate with her: she went out of the shed, and left her to weep in peace. It was the best plan: in a few minutes Caroline rejoined her, much calmer: she said with her natural, docile, gentle manner—

"Come, Shirley, we will go home now. I promise not to try to see Robert again till he asks for me. I never will try to push myself on him. I thank you for restraining me just now."

"I did it with a good intention," returned Miss Keeldar.

"Now, dear Lina," she continued; "let us turn our faces to the cool morning breeze, and walk very quietly back to the Rectory. We will steal in as we stole out: none shall know where we have been, or what we have seen to-night: neither taunt nor

misconstruction can consequently molest us. Tomorrow, we will see Robert, and be of good cheer; but I will say no more, lest I should begin to cry too. I seem hard towards you, but I am not so."

CHAPTER IX.

TO-MORROW.

THE two girls met no living soul on their way back to the Rectory: they let themselves in noiselessly; they stole up-stairs unheard: the breaking morning gave them what light they needed. Shirley sought her couch immediately; and, though the room was strange—for she had never slept at the Rectory before—and though the recent scene was one unparalleled for excitement and terror by any it had hitherto been her lot to witness, yet, scarce was her head laid on the pillow, ere a deep, refreshing sleep closed her eyes, and calmed her senses.

Perfect health was Shirley's enviable portion; though warm-hearted and sympathetic, she was not nervous: powerful emotions could rouse and sway, without exhausting, her spirit: the tempest troubled and shook her while it lasted; but it left her elasticity unbent, and her freshness quite unblighted. As every day brought her stimulating emotion, so

every night yielded her recreating rest. Caroline now watched her sleeping, and read the serenity of her mind in the beauty of her happy countenance.

For herself, being of a different temperament, she could not sleep. The common-place excitement of the tea-drinking and school-gathering, would alone have sufficed to make her restless all night: the effect of the terrible drama which had just been enacted before her eyes was not likely to quit her for days. It was vain even to try to retain a recumbent posture: she sat up by Shirley's side, counting the slow minutes, and watching the June sun mount the heavens.

Life wastes fast in such vigils as Caroline had of late but too often kept; vigils during which the mind,—having no pleasant food to nourish it—no manna of hope—no hived-honey of joyous memories—tries to live on the meagre diet of wishes, and failing to derive thence either delight or support, and feeling itself ready to perish with craving want, turns to philosophy, to resolution, to resignation; calls on all these gods for aid, calls vainly,—is unheard, unhelped, and languishes.

Caroline was a Christian; therefore in trouble she framed many a prayer after the Christian creed; preferred it with deep earnestness; begged for patience, strength, relief. This world, however, we all know, is the scene of trial and probation; and,

for any favourable result her petitions had yet wrought, it seemed to her that they were unheard and unaccepted. She believed, sometimes, that God had turned his face from her. At moments she was a Calvinist, and sinking into the gulf of religious despair, she saw darkening over her the doom of reprobation.

Most people have had a period or periods in their lives when they have felt thus forsaken; when, having long hoped against hope, and still seen the day of fruition deferred, their hearts have truly sickened within them. This is a terrible hour, but it is often that darkest point which precedes the rise of day; that turn of the year when the icy January wind carries over the waste at once the dirge of departing winter, and the prophecy of coming spring. The perishing birds, however, cannot thus understand the blast before which they shiver; and as little can the suffering soul recognise, in the climax of its affliction, the dawn of its deliverance. Yet, let whoever grieves still cling fast to love and faith in God: God will never deceive, never finally desert him. "Whom He loveth, He chasteneth." These words are true, and should not be forgotten.

The household was astir at last: the servants were up; the shutters were opened below. Caroline, as she quitted the couch, which had been but a thorny one to her, felt that revival of spirits which

the return of day, of action, gives to all but the wholly despairing or actually dying: she dressed herself, as usual, carefully, trying so to arrange her hair and attire that nothing of the forlornness she felt at heart should be visible externally: she looked as fresh as Shirley when both were dressed, only that Miss Keeldar's eyes were lively, and Miss Helstone's languid.

“To-day, I shall have much to say to Moore,” were Shirley's first words; and you could see in her face that life was full of interest, expectation, and occupation for her. “He will have to undergo cross-examination,” she added: “I daresay he thinks he has outwitted me cleverly. And this is the way men deal with women; still concealing danger from them: thinking, I suppose, to spare them pain. They imagined we little knew where they were to-night: we *know* they little conjectured where we were. Men, I believe, fancy women's minds something like those of children. Now, that is a mistake.”

This was said as she stood at the glass, training her naturally waved hair into curls, by twining it round her fingers. She took up the theme again five minutes after, as Caroline fastened her dress and clasped her girdle.

“If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they

do not read them in a true light; they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend. Then to hear them fall into extasies with each other's creations, worshipping the heroine of such a poem—novel—drama, thinking it fine—divine! Fine and divine it may be, but often quite artificial—false as the rose in my best bonnet there. If I spoke all I think on this point; if I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characters in first-rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones in half an hour.”

“Shirley, you chatter so, I can't fasten you: be still. And after all, authors' heroines are almost as good as authoress's heroes.”

“Not at all: women read men more truly than men read women. I'll prove that in a magazine paper some day when I've time; only it will never be inserted: it will be 'declined with thanks,' and left for me at the publishers.”

“To be sure: you could not write cleverly enough; you don't know enough; you are not learned, Shirley.”

“God knows, I can't contradict you, Cary: I'm as ignorant as a stone. There's one comfort, however, you are not much better.”

They descended to breakfast.

“I wonder how Mrs. Pryor and Hortense Moore have passed the night,” said Caroline, as she made the coffee. “Selfish being that I am! I never thought of either of them till just now: they will have heard all the tumult, Fieldhead and the Cottage are so near; and Hortense is timid in such matters: so no doubt is Mrs. Pryor.”

“Take my word for it, Lina, Moore will have contrived to get his sister out of the way: she went home with Miss Mann; he will have quartered her there for the night. As to Mrs. Pryor, I own I am uneasy about her; but in another half-hour we will be with her.”

By this time the news of what had happened at the Hollow was spread all over the neighbourhood. Fanny, who had been to Fieldhead to fetch the milk, returned in panting haste, with tidings that there had been a battle in the night at Mr. Moore’s mill, and that some said twenty men were killed. Eliza, during Fanny’s absence, had been apprised by the butcher’s boy that the Mill was burnt to the ground. Both women rushed into the parlour to announce these terrible facts to the ladies, terminating their clear and accurate narrative by the assertion that they were sure master must have been in it all: he and Thomas, the clerk, they were confident, must have gone last night to join Mr. Moore and the soldiers: Mr. Malone, too, had not been heard of at

his lodgings since yesterday afternoon ; and Joe Scott's wife and family were in the greatest distress, wondering what had become of their head.

Scarcely was this information imparted when a knock at the kitchen-door announced the Fieldhead errand-boy, arrived in hot haste, bearing a billet from Mrs. Pryor. It was hurriedly written, and urged Miss Keeldar to return directly, as the neighbourhood and the house seemed likely to be all in confusion, and orders would have to be given which the mistress of the hall alone could regulate. In a postscript it was entreated that Miss Helstone might not be left alone at the Rectory : she had better, it was suggested, accompany Miss Keeldar.

“ There are not two opinions on that head,” said Shirley, as she tied on her own bonnet, and then ran to fetch Caroline's.

“ But what will Fanny and Eliza do ? And if my uncle returns ?”

“ Your uncle will not return yet ; he has other fish to fry : he will be galloping backwards and forwards from Briarfield to Stilbro' all day, rousing the magistrates in the Court-house, and the officers at the barracks ; and Fanny and Eliza can have in Joe Scott's and the clerk's wives to bear them company. Besides, of course, there is no real danger to be apprehended now : weeks will elapse before the rioters can again rally, or plan any other attempt ;

and I am much mistaken if Moore and Mr. Helstone will not take advantage of last night's outbreak to quell them altogether : they will frighten the authorities of Stilbro' into energetic measures. I only hope they will not be too severe—not pursue the discomfited too relentlessly.”

“ Robert will not be cruel : we saw that last night,” said Caroline.

“ But he will be hard,” retorted Shirley ; “ and so will your uncle.”

As they hurried along the meadow and plantation-path to Fieldhead, they saw the distant highway already alive with an unwonted flow of equestrians and pedestrians, tending in the direction of the usually solitary Hollow. On reaching the hall, they found the back-yard gates open, and the court and kitchen seemed crowded with excited milk-fetchers—men, women, and children, whom Mrs. Gill, the house-keeper, appeared vainly persuading to take their milk-cans and depart. (*It is, or was, by-the-by, the custom in the north of England for the cottagers on a country squire's estate to receive their supplies of milk and butter from the dairy of the Manor-House, on whose pastures a herd of milch kine was usually fed for the convenience of the neighbourhood. Miss Keeldar owned such a herd—all deep-dewlapped, Craven cows, reared on the sweet herbage and clear waters of bonnie Airedale ; and very proud she was*

of their sleek aspect and high condition.) Seeing now the state of matters, and that it was desirable to effect a clearance of the premises, Shirley stepped in amongst the gossiping groups. She bade them good-morning with a certain, frank, tranquil ease—the natural characteristic of her manner when she addressed numbers; especially if those numbers belonged to the working-class: she was cooler amongst her equals, and rather proud to those above her. She then asked them if they had all got their milk measured out, and understanding that they had, she further observed that she “wondered what they were waiting for, then.”

“We’re just talking a bit over this battle there has been at your miln, Mistress,” replied a man.

“Talking a bit! Just like you!” said Shirley. “It is a queer thing that all the world is so fond of *talking* over events: you *talk* if anybody dies suddenly; you *talk* if a fire breaks out; you *talk* if a mill-owner fails; you *talk* if he’s murdered. What good does your *talking* do?”

There is nothing the lower orders like better than a little downright, good-humoured rating. Flattery they scorn very much: honest abuse they enjoy. They call it speaking “plainly, and take a sincere delight in being the objects thereof. The homely harshness of Miss Keeldar’s salutation won her the ear of the whole throng in a second.

“We’re no war nor some ’at is aboon us; are we?” asked a man smiling.

“Nor a whit better: you that should be models of industry are just as gossip-loving as the idle. Fine, rich people that have nothing to do, may be partly excused for trifling their time away: you who have to earn your bread with the sweat of your brow are quite inexcusable.”

“That’s queer, Mistress: suld we never have a holiday because we work hard?”

“*Never*,” was the prompt answer; “unless,” added the ‘mistress’ with a smile that half-belied the severity of her speech, “unless you knew how to make a better use of it than to get together over rum and tea, if you are women—or over beer and pipes, if you are men, and *talk* scandal at your neighbour’s expense. Come, friends,” she added, changing at once from bluntness to courtesy, “oblige me by taking your cans and going home. I expect several persons to call to-day, and it will be inconvenient to have the avenues to the house crowded.”

Yorkshire people are as yielding to persuasion as they are stubborn against compulsion: the yard was clear in five minutes.

“Thank you, and good-bye to you, friends,” said Shirley, as she closed the gates on a quiet court.

Now, let me hear the most refined of Cockneys pre-

sume to find fault with Yorkshire manners! Taken as they ought to be, the majority of the lads and lasses of the West-Riding are gentlemen and ladies, every inch of them: it is only against the weak affectation and futile pomposity of a would-be aristocrat they turn mutinous.

Entering by the back-way, the young ladies passed through the kitchen (or *house*, as the inner kitchen is called) to the hall. Mrs. Pryor came running down the oak staircase to meet them. She was all unnerved: her naturally sanguine complexion was pale; her usually placid, though timid, blue eye was wandering, unsettled, alarmed. She did not, however, break out into any exclamations, or hurried narrative of what had happened. Her predominant feeling had been in the course of the night, and was now this morning, a sense of dissatisfaction with herself that she could not feel firmer, cooler, more equal to the demands of the occasion.

“You are aware,” she began with a trembling voice, and yet the most conscientious anxiety to avoid exaggeration in what she was about to say,—“that a body of rioters has attacked Mr. Moore’s mill to-night: we heard the firing and confusion very plainly here: we none of us slept: it was a sad night: the house has been in great bustle all the morning with people coming and going: the servants have applied to me for orders and directions, which I

really did not feel warranted in giving. Mr. Moore has, I believe, sent up for refreshments for the soldiers and others engaged in the defence; for some conveniences also for the wounded. I could not undertake the responsibility of giving orders or taking measures. I fear delay may have been injurious in some instances; but this is not my house: you were absent, my dear Miss Keeldar—what could I do?”

“Were no refreshments sent?” asked Shirley, while her countenance, hitherto so clear, propitious, and quiet, even while she was rating the milk-fetchers, suddenly turned dark and warm.

“I think not, my dear.”

“And nothing for the wounded? no linen—no wine—no bedding?”

“I think not. I cannot tell what Mrs. Gill did; but it seemed impossible to me, at the moment, to venture to dispose of your property by sending supplies to soldiers—provisions for a company of soldiers sounds formidable: how many there are I did not ask; but I could not think of allowing them to pillage the house, as it were. I intended to do what was right; yet I did not see the case quite clearly, I own.”

“It lies in a nutshell, notwithstanding. These soldiers have risked their lives in defence of my property—I suppose they have a right to my gratitude:

the wounded are our fellow-creatures—I suppose we should aid them. Mrs. Gill!”

She turned, and called in a voice more clear than soft. It rung through the thick oak of the hall and kitchen doors more effectually than a bell's summons. Mrs. Gill, who was deep in bread-making, came with hands and apron in culinary case, not having dared to stop to rub the dough from the one, or to shake the flour from the other. Her mistress had never called a servant in that voice, save once before, and that was when she had seen from the window Tartar in full tug with two carrier's dogs, each of them a match for him in size, if not in courage, and their masters standing by, encouraging their animals, while hers was unbefriended: then, indeed, she had summoned John as if the Day of Judgment were at hand: nor had she waited for the said John's coming, but had walked out into the lane bonnetless; and after informing the carriers that she held them far less of men than the three brutes whirling and worrying in the dust before them, had put her hands round the thick neck of the largest of the curs and given her whole strength to the essay of choking it from Tartar's torn and bleeding eye, just above and below which organ the vengeful fangs were inserted. Five or six men were presently on the spot to help her, but she never thanked one of them: “They might

have come before, if their will had been good," she said. She had not a word for anybody during the rest of the day; but sat near the hall fire till evening watching and tending Tartar, who lay all gory, stiff, and swelled, on a mat at her feet. She wept furtively over him sometimes, and murmured the softest words of pity and endearment, in tones whose music the old, scarred, canine warrior acknowledged by licking her hand or her sandal alternately with his own red wounds. As to John, his lady turned a cold shoulder on him for a week afterwards.

Mrs. Gill, remembering this little episode, came "all of a tremble," as she said herself. In a firm, brief voice, Miss Keeldar proceeded to put questions and give orders. That at such a time Fieldhead should have evinced the inhospitality of a miser's hovel, stung her haughty spirit to the quick; and the revolt of its pride was seen in the heaving of her heart; stirred stormily under the lace and silk which veiled it.

"How long is it since that message came from the mill?"

"Not an hour yet, ma'am," answered the house-keeper, soothingly.

"Not an hour! You might almost as well have said not a day. They will have applied elsewhere by this time. Send a man instantly down to tell them that everything this house contains is at Mr.

Moore's, Mr. Helstone's, and the soldiers' service. Do that first!"

While the order was being executed, Shirley moved away from her friends, and stood at the hall-window, silent, unapproachable. When Mrs. Gill came back, she turned: the purple flush which painful excitement kindles on a pale cheek, glowed on hers: the spark which displeasure lights in a dark eye fired her glance.

"Let the contents of the larder and the wine-cellar be brought up, put into the hay-carts, and driven down to the Hollow. If there does not happen to be much bread or much meat in the house, go to the butcher and baker, and desire them to send what they have: but I will see for myself."

She moved off.

"All will be right soon: she will get over it in an hour," whispered Caroline to Mrs. Pryor. "Go upstairs, dear madam," she added, affectionately, "and try to be as calm and easy as you can. The truth is, Shirley will blame herself more than you before the day is over."

By dint of a few more gentle assurances and persuasions, Miss Helstone contrived to soothe the agitated lady. Having accompanied her to her apartment, and promised to rejoin her there when things were settled, Caroline left her to see, as she said, "if she could be useful." She presently found that

she could be very useful ; for the retinue of servants at Fieldhead was by no means numerous, and just now their mistress found plenty of occupation for all the hands at her command, and for her own also. The delicate good-nature and dexterous activity which Caroline brought to the aid of the house-keeper and maids,—all somewhat scared by their lady's unwonted mood—did a world of good at once : it helped the assistants and appeased the directress. A chance glance and smile from Caroline moved Shirley to an answering smile directly. The former was carrying a heavy basket up the cellar-stairs.

“ This is a shame ! ” cried Shirley, running to her. “ It will strain your arm. ”

She took it from her, and herself bore it out into the yard. The cloud of temper was dispelled when she came back ; the flash in her eye was melted ; the shade on her forehead vanished : she resumed her usual cheerful and cordial manner to those about her, tempering her revived spirits with a little of the softness of shame at her previous unjust anger.

She was still superintending the lading of the cart, when a gentleman entered the yard and approached her ere she was aware of his presence.

“ I hope I see Miss Keeldar well, this morning ? ” he said, examining with rather significant scrutiny her still flushed face.

 She gave him a look, and then again bent to her

employment, without reply. A pleasant enough smile played on her lips, but she hid it. The gentleman repeated his salutation, stooping, that it might reach her ear with more facility.

“Well enough, if she be good enough,” was the answer; “and so is Mr. Moore too, I dare say. To speak truth, I am not anxious about him; some slight mischance would be only his just due: his conduct has been—we will say *strange*, just now, till we have time to characterize it by a more exact epithet. Meantime, may I ask what brings him here?”

“Mr. Helstone and I have just received your message, that everything at Fieldhead was at our service. We judged, by the unlimited wording of the gracious intimation, that you would be giving yourself too much trouble: I perceive, our conjecture was correct. We are not a regiment, remember: only about half a dozen soldiers, and as many civilians. Allow me to retrench something from these too abundant supplies.”

Miss Keeldar blushed, while she laughed at her own over-eager generosity, and most disproportionate calculations. Moore laughed too—very quietly, though; and as quietly, he ordered basket after basket to be taken from the cart, and remanded vessel after vessel to the cellar.

“The Rector must hear of this,” he said: “he will make a good story of it. What an excellent army-

contractor Miss Keeldar would have been!" again he laughed, adding—"It is precisely as I conjectured."

"You ought to be thankful," said Shirley, "and not mock me. What could I do? How could I gauge your appetites, or number your band? For aught I knew, there might have been fifty of you at least to victual. You told me nothing; and then, an application to provision soldiers naturally suggests large ideas."

"It appears so," remarked Moore, levelling another of his keen, quiet glances at the discomfited Shirley. "Now," he continued, addressing the carter, "I think you may take what remains to the Hollow. Your load will be somewhat lighter than the one Miss Keeldar destined you to carry."

As the vehicle rumbled out of the yard, Shirley, rallying her spirits, demanded what had become of the wounded.

"There was not a single man hurt on our side was the answer."

"You were hurt yourself, on the temples," interposed a quick, low voice—that of Caroline, who, having withdrawn within the shade of the door, and behind the large person of Mrs. Gill, had till now escaped Moore's notice: when she spoke, his eye searched the obscurity of her retreat.

"Are you much hurt?" she inquired.

“As you might scratch your finger with a needle in sewing.”

“Lift your hair, and let us see.”

He took his hat off, and did as he was bid, disclosing only a narrow slip of court-plaster. Caroline indicated, by a slight movement of the head, that she was satisfied, and disappeared within the clear obscure of the interior.

“How did she know I was hurt?” asked Moore.

“By rumour, no doubt. But it is too good in her to trouble herself about you. For my part, it was of your victims I was thinking when I inquired after the wounded: what damage have your opponents sustained?”

“One of the rioters, or victims, as you call them, was killed, and six were hurt.”

“What have you done with them?”

“What you will perfectly approve. Medical aid was procured immediately; and as soon as we can get a couple of covered waggons, and some clean straw, they will be removed to Stilbro’.”

“Straw! you must have beds and bedding. I will send my waggon directly, properly furnished; and Mr. Yorke, I am sure, will send his.”

“You guess correctly: he has volunteered already; and Mrs. Yorke—who, like you, seems disposed to regard the rioters as martyrs, and me, and especially Mr. Helstone, as murderers—is at this moment, I

believe, most assiduously engaged in fitting it up with featherbeds, pillows, bolsters, blankets, &c. The *victims* lack no attentions—I promise you. Mr. Hall—your favourite parson—has been with them ever since six o'clock, exhorting them, praying with them, and even waiting on them like any nurse; and Carc-line's good friend, Miss Ainley, that *very* plain old maid, sent in a stock of lint and linen, something in the proportion of another lady's allowance of beef and wine."

"That will do. Where is your sister?"

"Well cared for. I had her securely domiciled with Miss Mann. This very morning, the two set out for Wormwood Wells (a noted watering-place), and will stay there some weeks."

"So Mr. Helstone domiciled me at the Rectory! Mighty clever you gentlemen think you are! I make you heartily welcome to the idea, and hope its savour, as you chew the cud of reflection upon it, gives you pleasure. Acute and astute, why are you not also omniscient? How is it that events transpire, under your very noses, of which you have no suspicion? It should be so, otherwise the exquisite gratification of out-manœuvring you would be unknown. Ah! friend, you may search my countenance, but you cannot read it."

Moore, indeed, looked as if he could not.

“You think me a dangerous specimen of my sex. Don't you, now?”

“A peculiar one, at least.”

“But Caroline—is she peculiar?”

“In her way—yes.”

“Her way? What is her way?”

“You know her as well as I do.”

“And knowing her, I assert that she is neither eccentric nor difficult of control: is she?”

“That depends ——”

“However, there is nothing masculine about *her*?”

“Why lay such emphasis on *her*? Do you consider her a contrast, in that respect, to yourself?”

“You do, no doubt: but that does not signify. Caroline is neither masculine, nor of what they call the spirited order of women.”

“I have seen her flash out.”

“So have I—but not with manly fire: it was a short, vivid, trembling glow, that shot up, shone, vanished ——”

“And left her scared at her own daring. You describe others besides Caroline.”

“The point I wish to establish is, that Miss Helstone, though gentle, tractable, and candid enough, is still perfectly capable of defying even Mr. Moore's penetration.”

“What have you and she been doing?” asked Moore, suddenly.

“Have you had any breakfast?”

“What is your mutual mystery?”

“If you are hungry, Mrs. Gill will give you something to eat here. Step into the oak-parlour, and ring the bell—you will be served as if at an inn; or, if you like better, go back to the Hollow.”

“The alternative is not open to me: I *must* go back. Good-morning: the first leisure I have, I will see you again.”

CHAPTER X.

MRS. PRYOR.

WHILE Shirley was talking with Moore, Caroline rejoined Mrs. Pryor up-stairs. She found that lady deeply depressed. She would not say that Miss Keeldar's hastiness had hurt her feelings; but it was evident an inward wound galled her. To any but a congenial nature, she would have seemed insensible to the quiet, tender attentions by which Miss Helstone sought to impart solace; but Caroline knew that, unmoved or slightly moved as she looked, she felt, valued, and was healed by them.

“I am deficient in self-confidence and decision,” she said at last. “I always have been deficient in those qualities: yet I think Miss Keeldar should have known my character well enough by this time, to be aware that I always feel an even painful solicitude to do right, to act for the best. The unusual nature of the demand on my judgment puzzled me,

especially following the alarms of the night. I could not venture to act promptly for another: but I trust no serious harm will result from my lapse of firmness."

A gentle knock was here heard at the door: it was half-opened.

"Caroline, come here," said a low voice.

Miss Helstone went out: there stood Shirley in the gallery, looking contrite, ashamed, sorry as any repentant child.

"How is Mrs. Pryor?" she asked.

"Rather out of spirits," said Caroline.

"I have behaved very shamefully, very ungenerously, very ungratefully to her," said Shirley. "How insolent in me to turn on her thus, for what after all was no fault, only an excess of conscientiousness on her part. But I regret my error most sincerely: tell her so, and ask if she will forgive me."

Caroline discharged the errand with heart-felt pleasure. Mrs. Pryor rose, came to the door: she did not like scenes; she dreaded them as all timid people do: she said falteringly—

"Come in, my dear."

Shirley did come in with some impetuosity: she threw her arms round her governess, and while she kissed her heartily, she said—

"You know you *must* forgive me, Mrs. Pryor. I

could not get on at all if there was a misunderstanding between you and me.”

“I have nothing to forgive,” was the reply. “We will pass it over now if you please. The final result of the incident is, that it proves more plainly than ever how unequal I am to certain crises.”

And that was the painful feeling which *would* remain on Mrs. Pryor’s mind: no effort of Shirley’s or Caroline’s could efface it thence: she could forgive her offending pupil, not her innocent self.

Miss Keeldar, doomed to be in constant request during the morning, was presently summoned downstairs again. The Rector called first: a lively welcome and livelier reprimand were at his service; he expected both, and, being in high spirits, took them in equally good part.

In the course of his brief visit, he quite forgot to ask after his niece: the riot, the rioters, the mill, the magistrates, the heiress, absorbed all his thoughts to the exclusion of family ties. He alluded to the part himself and Curate had taken in the defence of the Hollow.

“The vials of pharisaical wrath will be emptied on our heads, for our share in this business,” he said; “but I defy every calumniator. I was there only to support the law, to play my part as a man and a Briton; which characters I deem quite compatible with those of the priest and Levite, in their highest

sense. Your tenant, Moore," he went on, "has won my approbation. A cooler commander I would not wish to see, nor a more determined. Besides, the man has shown sound judgment and good sense; first, in being thoroughly prepared for the event which has taken place, and subsequently, when his well-concerted plans had secured him success, in knowing how to use without abusing his victory. Some of the magistrates are now well-frightened, and, like all cowards, shew a tendency to be cruel; Moore restrains them with admirable prudence. He has hitherto been very unpopular in the neighbourhood; but, mark my words, the tide of opinion will now take a turn in his favour: people will find out that they have not appreciated him, and will hasten to remedy their error; and he, when he perceives the public disposed to acknowledge his merits, will shew a more gracious mien than that with which he has hitherto favoured us."

Mr. Helstone was about to add to this speech some half-jesting, half-serious warnings to Miss Keeldar, on the subject of her rumoured partiality for her talented tenant, when a ring at the door, announcing another caller, checked his raillery; and as that other caller appeared in the form of a white-haired, elderly gentleman, with a rather truculent countenance and disdainful eye—in short, our old acquaintance, and the Rector's old enemy, Mr. Yorke,

the priest and Levite, seized his hat, and with the briefest of adieux to Miss Keeldar, and the sternest of nods to her guest, took an abrupt leave.

Mr. Yorke was in no mild mood, and in no measured terms did he express his opinion on the transaction of the night: Moore, the magistrates, the soldiers, the mob-leaders each and all came in for a share of his invectives; but he reserved his strongest epithets—and real, racy Yorkshire Doric adjectives they were—for the benefit of the fighting parsons, the “sanguinary, demoniac” Rector and Curate. According to him, the cup of ecclesiastical guilt was now full indeed.

“The Church,” he said, “was in a bonnie pickle now: it was time it came down when parsons took to swaggering amang soldiers, blazing away wi’ bullet and gunpowder, taking the lives of far honestest men than themselves.”

“What would Moore have done, if nobody had helped him?” asked Shirley.

“Drunk as he ’d brewed—eaten as he ’d baked.”

“Which means, you would have left him by himself to face that mob. Good. He has plenty of courage; but the greatest amount of gallantry that ever garrisoned one human breast could scarce avail against two hundred.”

“He had the soldiers; those poor slaves who hire out their own blood and spill other folks for money.”

“ You abuse soldiers almost as much as you abuse clergymen. All who wear red coats are national refuse in your eyes, and all who wear black are national swindlers. Mr. Moore, according to you, did wrong to get military aid, and he did still worse to accept of any other aid. Your way of talking amounts to this:—he should have abandoned his mill and his life to the rage of a set of misguided madmen, and Mr. Helstone and every other gentleman in the parish should have looked on, and seen the building razed and its owner slaughtered, and never stirred a finger to save either.”

“ If Moore had behaved to his men from the beginning as a master ought to behave, they never would have entertained their present feelings towards him.”

“ Easy for you to talk,” exclaimed Miss Keeldar, who was beginning to wax warm in her tenant’s cause: “ you, whose family have lived at Briarmains for six generations, to whose person the people have been accustomed for fifty years, who know all their ways, prejudices, and preferences. Easy, indeed, for *you* to act so as to avoid offending them; but Mr. Moore came a stranger into the district: he came here poor and friendless, with nothing but his own energies to back him; nothing but his honour, his talent, and his industry to make his way for him. A monstrous crime indeed that, under such circum-

stances, he could not popularize his naturally grave, quiet manners, all at once: could not be jocular, and free, and cordial with a strange peasantry, as you are with your fellow-townsmen! An unpardonable transgression, that when he introduced improvements he did not go about the business in quite the most polite way; did not gradate his changes as delicately as a rich capitalist might have done! For errors of this sort is he to be the victim of mob-outrage? Is he to be denied even the privilege of defending himself? Are those who have the hearts of men in their breasts (and Mr. Helstone—say what you will of him—has such a heart) to be reviled like malefactors because they stand by him—because they venture to espouse the cause of one against two hundred?”

“Come—come now—be cool,” said Mr. Yorke, smiling at the earnestness with which Shirley multiplied her rapid questions.

“Cool! Must I listen coolly to downright nonsense—to dangerous nonsense? No. I like you very well, Mr. Yorke, as you know; but I thoroughly dislike some of your principles. All that cant—excuse me, but I repeat the word—all that *cant* about soldiers and parsons is most offensive in my ears. All ridiculous, irrational crying up of one class, whether the same be aristocrat or democrat—all howling down of another class,

whether clerical or military — all exacting injustice to individuals, whether monarch or mendicant — is really sickening to me: all arraying of ranks against ranks, all party hatreds, all tyrannies disguised as liberties, I reject and wash my hands of. *You* think you are a philanthropist; *you* think you are an advocate of liberty; but I will tell you this—Mr. Hall, the parson of Nunnely, is a better friend both of man and freedom, than Hiram Yorke, the Reformer of Briarfield.”

From a man, Mr. Yorke would not have borne this language very patiently, nor would he have endured it from some women; but he accounted Shirley both honest and pretty, and her plain-spoken ire amused him: besides, he took a secret pleasure in hearing her defend her tenant, for we have already intimated he had Robert Moore's interest very much at heart: moreover, if he wished to avenge himself for her severity, he knew the means lay in his power: a word, he believed, would suffice to tame and silence her, to cover her frank forehead with the rosy shadow of shame, and veil the glow of her eye under down-drooped lid and lash.

“What more hast thou to say?” he inquired, as she paused, rather it appeared to take breath, than because her subject or her zeal was exhausted.

“Say, Mr. Yorke?” was the answer, the speaker meantime walking fast from wall to wall of the oak-

parlour. "Say? I have a great deal to say, if I could get it out in lucid order, which I never *can* do. I have to say that your views, and those of most extreme politicians are such as none but men in an irresponsible position *can* advocate; that they are purely opposition views, meant only to be talked about, and never intended to be acted on. Make you prime minister of England to-morrow, and you would have to abandon them. You abuse Moore for defending his mill: had you been in Moore's place you could not with honour or sense have acted otherwise than he acted. You abuse Mr. Helstone for everything he does: Mr. Helstone has his faults: he sometimes does wrong, but oftener right. Were you ordained vicar of Briarfield, you would find it no easy task to sustain all the active schemes for the benefit of the parish planned and persevered in by your predecessor. I wonder people cannot judge more fairly of each other and themselves. When I hear Messrs. Malone and Donne chatter about the authority of the Church, the dignity and claims of the priesthood, the deference due to them as clergymen; when I hear the outbreaks of their small spite against Dissenters; when I witness their silly narrow jealousies and assumptions; when their palaver about forms, and traditions, and superstitions, is sounding in my ear; when I behold their insolent carriage to the poor, their often base servility to the

rich, I think the Establishment is indeed in a poor way, and both she and her sons appear in the utmost need of reformation. Turning away distressed from minster-tower and village spire—ay, as distressed as a churchwarden who feels the exigence of white-wash, and has not wherewithal to purchase lime—I recall your senseless sarcasms on the ‘fat bishops,’ the ‘pampered parsons,’ ‘old mother church,’ &c. I remember your strictures on all who differ from you, your sweeping condemnation of classes and individuals, without the slightest allowance made for circumstances or temptations; and then, Mr. Yorke, doubt clutches my inmost heart as to whether men exist clement, reasonable, and just enough to be entrusted with the task of reform. I don’t believe *you* are of the number.”

“You have an ill opinion of me, Miss Shirley: you never told me so much of your mind before.”

“I never had an opening; but I have sat on Jessy’s stool by your chair in the back-parlour at Briarmains, for evenings together, listening excitedly to your talk, half-admiring what you said, and half-rebelling against it. I think you a fine old Yorkshireman, sir: I am proud to have been born in the same county and parish as yourself—truthful, upright, independent you are, as a rock based below seas; but also you are harsh, rude, narrow, and merciless.”

“ Not to the poor, lass—nor to the meek of the earth—only to the proud and high-minded.”

“ And what right have you, sir, to make such distinctions? A prouder—a higher-minded man than yourself does not exist. You find it easy to speak comfortably to your inferiors—you are too haughty, too ambitious, too jealous to be civil to those above you. But you are all alike. Helstone also is proud and prejudiced. Moore, though juster and more considerate than either you or the Rector, is still haughty, stern, and, in a public sense, selfish. It is well there are such men as Mr. Hall to be found occasionally: men of large and kind hearts, who can love their whole race, who can forgive others for being richer, more prosperous, or more powerful than they are. Such men may have less originality, less force of character than you, but they are better friends to mankind.”

“ And when is it to be?” said Mr. Yorke, now rising.

“ When is what to be?”

“ The wedding.”

“ Whose wedding?”

“ Only that of Robert Gérard Moore, Esq. of Hollow's Cottage, with Miss Keeldar, daughter and heiress of the late Charles Cave Keeldar of Field-head Hall.”

Shirley gazed at the questioner with rising colour;

but the light in her eye was not faltering: it shone steadily—yes—it burned deeply.

“That is your revenge,” she said, slowly: then added; “Would it be a bad match, unworthy of the late Charles Cave Keeldar’s representative?”

“My lass, Moore is a gentleman: his blood is pure and ancient as mine or thine.”

“And we two set store by ancient blood? We have family pride, though one of us at least is a Republican?”

Yorke bowed as he stood before her. His lips were mute, but his eye confessed the impeachment. Yes—he had family pride—you saw it in his whole bearing.

“Moore is a gentleman,” echoed Shirley, lifting her head with glad grace. She checked herself—words seemed crowding to her tongue, she would not give them utterance; but her look spoke much at the moment: what——Yorke tried to read, but could not—the language was there——visible, but untranslatable—a poem—a fervid lyric in an unknown tongue. It was not a plain story, however—no simple gush of feeling—no ordinary love-confession—that was obvious; it was something other, deeper, more intricate than he guessed at: he felt his revenge had not struck home; he felt that Shirley triumphed—she held him at fault, baffled, puzzled: *she* enjoyed the moment—not *he*.”

“ And if Moore *is* a gentleman, you *can* be only a lady, therefore ——”

“ Therefore there would be no inequality in our union ?”

“ None.”

“ Thank you for your approbation. Will you give me away when I relinquish the name of Keeldar for that of Moore ?”

Mr. Yorke instead of replying, gazed at her much puzzled. He could not divine what her look signified ; whether she spoke in earnest or in jest : there was purpose and feeling, banter and scoff playing, mingled, on her mobile lineaments.

“ I don't understand thee,” he said, turning away.

She laughed : “ Take courage, sir ; you are not singular in your ignorance : but I suppose if Moore understands me that will do—will it not ?”

“ Moore may settle his own matters henceforward for me ; I'll neither meddle nor make with them further.”

A new thought crossed her : her countenance changed magically : with a sudden darkening of the eye, and austere fixing of the features, she demanded :—

“ Have you been asked to interfere ? Are you questioning me as another's proxy ?”

“ The Lord save us. Whoever weds thee must look about him ! Keep all your questions for

Robert; I'll answer no more on 'em. Good-day, lassie!"

The day being fine, or at least fair—for soft clouds curtained the sun, and a dim but not chill or waterish haze slept blue on the hills—Caroline, while Shirley was engaged with her callers, had persuaded Mrs. Pryor to assume her bonnet and summer shawl, and to take a walk with her up towards the narrow end of the Hollow.

Here, the opposing sides of the glen approaching each other, and becoming clothed with brushwood and stunted oaks, formed a wooded ravine; at the bottom of which ran the mill-stream, in broken unquiet course, struggling with many stones, chafing against rugged banks, fretting with gnarled tree-roots, foaming, gurgling, battling as it went. Here, when you had wandered half a mile from the mill, you found a sense of deep solitude: found it in the shade of unmolested trees; received it in the singing of many birds, for which that shade made a home. This was no trodden way: the freshness of the woodflowers attested that foot of man seldom pressed them: the abounding wild-roses looked as if they budded, bloomed, and faded under the watch of solitude, as in a Sultan's harem. Here you saw the sweet azure of blue-bells, and recognised in pearl-

white blossoms, spangling the grass, a humble type of some starlit spot in space.

Mrs. Pryor liked a quiet walk: she ever shunned highroads, and sought byeways and lonely lanes: one companion she preferred to total solitude, for in solitude she was nervous: a vague fear of annoying encounters broke the enjoyment of quite lonely rambles; but she feared nothing with Caroline: when once she got away from human habitations, and entered the still demesne of Nature, accompanied by this one youthful friend, a propitious change seemed to steal over her mind and beam in her countenance. When with Caroline—and Caroline only—her heart, you would have said, shook off a burden, her brow put aside a veil, her spirits too escaped from a restraint: with her she was cheerful; with her, at times, she was tender: to her she would impart her knowledge, reveal glimpses of her experience, give her opportunities for guessing what life she had lived, what cultivation her mind had received, of what calibre was her intelligence, how and where her feelings were vulnerable.

To-day, for instance, as they walked along, Mrs. Pryor talked to her companion about the various birds singing in the trees, discriminated their species, and said something about their habits and peculiarities. English natural history seemed familiar to her. All the wild flowers round their path were

recognised by her : tiny plants springing near stones and peeping out of chinks in old walls—plants such as Caroline had scarcely noticed before—received a name and an intimation of their properties : it appeared that she had minutely studied the botany of English fields and woods. Having reached the head of the ravine, they sat down together on a ledge of gray and mossy rock jutting from the base of a steep green hill, which towered above them : she looked round her, and spoke of the neighbourhood as she had once before seen it long ago. She alluded to its changes, and compared its aspect with that of other parts of England ; revealing in quiet, unconscious touches of description, a sense of the picturesque, an appreciation of the beautiful or commonplace, a power of comparing the wild with the cultured, the grand with the tame, that gave to her discourse a graphic charm as pleasant as it was unpretending.

The sort of reverent pleasure with which Caroline listened—so sincere, so quiet, yet so evident, stirred the elder lady's faculties to gentle animation. Rarely, probably, had she, with her chill, repellent outside—her diffident mien and incommunicative habits, known what it was to excite in one whom she herself could love, feelings of earnest affection and admiring esteem. Delightful, doubtless, was the consciousness that a young girl towards whom it seemed—judging by the moved expression of her

eyes and features—her heart turned with almost a fond impulse, looked up to her as an instructor, and clung to her as a friend. With a somewhat more marked accent of interest than she often permitted herself to use, she said, as she bent towards her youthful companion, and put aside from her forehead a pale brown curl which had strayed from the confining comb:—

“I do hope this sweet air blowing from the hill will do you good, my dear Caroline: I wish I could see something more of colour in these cheeks—but perhaps you were never florid?”

“I had red cheeks once,” returned Miss Helstone, smiling. “I remember a year—two years ago, when I used to look in the glass, I saw a different face there to what I see now—rounder and rosier. But when we are young,” added the girl of eighteen, “our minds are careless and our lives easy.”

“Do you”—continued Mrs. Pryor, mastering by an effort that tyrant timidity which made it difficult for her, even under present circumstances, to attempt the scrutiny of another’s heart,—“Do you, at your age, fret yourself with cares for the future? Believe me, you had better not: let the morrow take thought for the things of itself.”

“True, dear madam: it is not over the future I pine. The evil of the day is sometimes oppressive—*too* oppressive, and I long to escape it.”

“That is—the evil of the day—that is—your uncle perhaps is not—you find it difficult to understand—he does not appreciate—”

Mrs. Pryor could not complete her broken sentences: she could not manage to put the question whether Mr. Helstone was too harsh with his niece, but Caroline comprehended.

“Oh, that is nothing,” she replied; “my uncle and I get on very well: we never quarrel—I don’t call him harsh—he never scolds me. Sometimes I wish somebody in the world loved me; but I cannot say that I particularly wish him to have more affection for me than he has. As a child, I should perhaps have felt the want of attention, only the servants were very kind to me; but when people are long indifferent to us, we grow indifferent to their indifference. It is my uncle’s way not to care for women and girls—unless they be ladies that he meets in company: he could not alter, and I have no wish that he should alter, as far as I am concerned. I believe it would merely annoy and frighten me were he to be affectionate towards me now. But you know, Mrs. Pryor, it is scarcely *living* to measure time as I do at the Rectory. The hours pass, and I get them over somehow, but I do not *live*. I endure existence, but I rarely enjoy it. Since Miss Keeldar and you came, I have been—I was going to say—happier, but that would be untrue.” She paused.

“How, untrue? You are fond of Miss Keeldar, are you not, my dear?”

“Very fond of Shirley: I both like and admire her: but I am painfully circumstanced: for a reason I cannot explain, I want to go away from this place, and to forget it.”

“You told me before you wished to be a governess; but, my dear, if you remember, I did not encourage the idea. I have been a governess myself great part of my life. In Miss Keeldar’s acquaintance, I esteem myself most fortunate: her talents and her really sweet disposition have rendered my office easy to me; but when I was young, before I married, my trials were severe, poignant. I should not like a ——. I should not like you to endure similar ones. It was my lot to enter a family of considerable pretensions to good birth and mental superiority, and the members of which also believed that ‘on them was perceptible’ an unusual endowment of the ‘Christian graces:’ that all their hearts were regenerate, and their spirits in a peculiar state of discipline. I was early given to understand, that ‘as I was not their equal,’ so I could not expect ‘to have their sympathy.’ It was in no sort concealed from me that I was held ‘a burden and a restraint in society.’ The gentlemen, I found, regarded me as ‘a tabooed woman,’ to whom ‘they were interdicted from granting the usual privileges

of the sex,' and yet who 'annoyed them by frequently crossing their path.' The ladies too made it plain that they thought me 'a bore.' The servants, it was signified, 'detested me: *why*, I could never clearly comprehend. My pupils, I was told, 'however much they might love me, and how deep soever the interest I might take in them, could not be my friends.' It was intimated, that I must 'live alone, and never transgress the invisible but rigid line which established the difference between me and my employers.' My life in this house was sedentary, solitary, constrained, joyless, toilsome. The dreadful crushing of the animal spirits, the ever prevailing sense of friendlessness and homelessness consequent on this state of things, began ere long to produce mortal effects on my constitution, —I sickened. The lady of the house told me coolly I was the victim of 'wounded vanity.' She hinted, that if I did not make an effort to quell my 'ungodly discontent,' to cease 'murmuring against God's appointment,' and to cultivate the profound humility befitting my station, my mind would very likely 'go to pieces' on the rock that wrecked most of my sisterhood—morbid self-esteem; and that I should die an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

"I said nothing to Mrs. Hardman; it would have been useless; but to her eldest daughter I one day

dropped a few observations, which were answered thus :—

“ There were hardships, she allowed, in the position of a governess: ‘ doubtless they had their trials; but,’ she averred, with a manner it makes me smile now to recall—‘ but it must be so. *She* (Miss H.) had neither view, hope, nor *wish* to see these things remedied; for, in the inherent constitution of English habits, feelings, and prejudices, there was no possibility that they should be. Governesses,’ she observed, ‘ must ever be kept in a sort of isolation: it is the only means of maintaining that distance which the reserve of English manners and the decorum of English families exact.’

“ I remember I sighed as Miss Hardman quitted my bedside: she caught the sound, and turning, said severely,—

“ ‘ I fear, Miss Grey, you have inherited in fullest measure the worst sin of our fallen nature—the sin of pride. You are proud, and therefore you are ungrateful too. Mama pays you a handsome salary; and, if you had average sense, you would thankfully put up with much that is fatiguing to do and irksome to bear, since it is so well made worth your while.’

“ Miss Hardman, my love, was a very strong-minded young lady, of most distinguished talents: the aristocracy are decidedly a very superior class,

you know—both physically and morally and mentally—as a high Tory I acknowledge that—I could not describe the dignity of her voice and mien as she addressed me thus: still, I fear, she was selfish, my dear. I would never wish to speak ill of my superiors in rank; but I think she was a little selfish.

“I remember,” continued Mrs. Pryor, after a pause, “another of Miss H.’s observations, which she would utter with quite a grand air. ‘WE,’ she would say,—‘WE need the imprudencies, extravagances, mistakes, and crimes of a certain number of fathers to sow the seed from which WE reap the harvest of governesses. The daughters of tradespeople, however well educated, must necessarily be underbred, and as such unfit to be inmates of OUR dwellings, or guardians of OUR children’s minds and persons. WE shall ever prefer to place those about OUR offspring, who have been born and bred with somewhat of the same refinement as OURSELVES.’”

“Miss Hardman must have thought herself something better than her fellow-creatures, ma’am, since she held that their calamities, and even crimes, were necessary to minister to her convenience. You say she was religious: her religion must have been that of the Pharisee, who thanked God that he was not as other men are, nor even as that publican.”

“My dear, we will not discuss the point: I should be the last person to wish to instil into your mind

any feeling of dissatisfaction with your lot in life, or any sentiment of envy or insubordination towards your superiors. Implicit submission to authorities, scrupulous deference to our betters (under which term I, of course, include the higher classes of society) are, in my opinion, indispensable to the wellbeing of every community. All I mean to say, my dear, is, that you had better not attempt to be a governess, as the duties of the position would be too severe for your constitution. Not one word of disrespect would I breathe towards either Mrs. or Miss Hardman; only, recalling my own experience, I cannot but feel that, were you to fall under auspices such as theirs, you would contend a while courageously with your doom; then you would pine and grow too weak for your work: you would come home—if you still had a home—broken down. Those languishing years would follow, of which none but the invalid and her immediate friends feel the heart-sickness and know the burden: consumption or decline would close the chapter. Such is the history of many a life: I would not have it yours. My dear, we will now walk about a little, if you please.”

They both rose and slowly paced a green natural terrace bordering the chasm.

“My dear,” ere long again began Mrs. Pryor, a sort of timid, embarrassed abruptness marking her

manner as she spoke, "the young, especially those to whom nature has been favourable—often—frequently—anticipate—look forward to—to marriage as the end, the goal of their hopes."

And she stopped. Caroline came to her relief with promptitude, showing a great deal more self-possession and courage than herself on the formidable topic now broached.

"They do; and naturally," she replied, with a calm emphasis that startled Mrs. Pryor. "They look forward to marriage with some one they love as the brightest,—the only bright destiny that can await them. Are they wrong?"

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Pryor, clasping her hands: and again she paused. Caroline turned a searching, an eager eye on the face of her friend: that face was much agitated. "My dear," she murmured, "life is an illusion."

"But not love! Love is real: the most real, the most lasting,—the sweetest and yet the bitterest thing we know."

"My dear—it is very bitter. It is said to be strong—strong as death! Most of the cheats of existence are strong. As to their sweetness—nothing is so transitory: its date is a moment,—the twinkling of an eye: the sting remains for ever: it may perish with the dawn of eternity, but it tortures through time into its deepest night."

“Yes, it tortures through time,” agreed Caroline, “except when it is mutual love.”

“Mutual love! My dear, romances are pernicious. You do not read them, I hope?”

“Sometimes—whenever I can get them, indeed; but romance-writers might know nothing of love, judging by the way in which they treat of it.”

“Nothing whatever, my dear!” assented Mrs. Pryor, eagerly; “nor of marriage; and the false pictures they give of those subjects cannot be too strongly condemned. They are not like reality: they show you only the green tempting surface of the marsh, and give not one faithful or truthful hint of the slough underneath.”

“But it is not always slough,” objected Caroline: “there are happy marriages. Where affection is reciprocal and sincere, and minds are harmonious, marriages *must* be happy.”

“It is never wholly happy. Two people can never literally be as one: there is, perhaps, a possibility of content under peculiar circumstances, such as are seldom combined; but it is as well not to run the risk: you may make fatal mistakes. Be satisfied, my dear: let all the single be satisfied with their freedom.”

“You echo my uncle’s words!” exclaimed Caroline, in a tone of dismay: “you speak like Mrs. Yorke, in her most gloomy moments:—like Miss

Mann, when she is most sourly and hypochondriacally disposed. This is terrible!"

"No, it is only true. Oh, child! you have only lived the pleasant morning time of life: the hot, weary noon, the sad evening, the sunless night are yet to come for you! Mr. Helstone, you say, talks as I talk; and I wonder how Mrs. Matthewson Helstone would have talked had she been living. She died! she died!"

"And, alas! my own mother and father" exclaimed Caroline, struck by a sombre recollection.

"What of them?"

"Did I never tell you that they were separated?"

"I have heard it."

"They must then have been very miserable."

"You see all *facts* go to prove what I say."

"In this case there ought to be no such thing as marriage."

"There ought, my dear, were it only to prove that this life is a mere state of probation, wherein neither rest nor recompense is to be vouchsafed."

"But your own marriage, Mrs. Pryor?"

Mrs. Pryor shrunk and shuddered as if a rude finger had pressed a naked nerve: Caroline felt she had touched what would not bear the slightest contact.

"My marriage was unhappy," said the lady, summoning courage at last; "but yet——" she hesitated.

“But yet,” suggested Caroline, “not immitigably wretched?”

“Not in its results, at least. No,” she added, in a softer tone; “God mingles something of the balm of mercy even in vials of the most corrosive woe. He can so turn events, that from the very same blind, rash act whence sprang the curse of half our life, may flow the blessing of the remainder. Then, I am of a peculiar disposition, I own that: far from facile, without address, in some points eccentric. I ought never to have married: mine is not the nature easily to find a duplicate, or likely to assimilate with a contrast. I was quite aware of my own ineligibility; and if I had not been so miserable as a governess, I never should have married; and then ——”

Caroline’s eyes asked her to proceed: they entreated her to break the thick cloud of despair, which her previous words had seemed to spread over life.

“And then, my dear, Mr. ——, that is, the gentleman I married, was, perhaps, rather an exceptional than an average character. I hope, at least, the experience of few has been such as mine was, or that few have felt their sufferings as I felt mine. They nearly shook my mind: relief was so hopeless, redress so unattainable: but, my dear, I do not wish to dishearten, I only wish to warn you, and to prove

that the single should not be too anxious to change their state, as they may change for the worse."

"Thank you, my dear madam. I quite understand your kind intentions; but there is no fear of my falling into the error to which you allude. I, at least, have no thoughts of marriage, and for that reason, I want to make myself a position by some other means."

"My dear, listen to me. On what I am going to say, I have carefully deliberated; having, indeed, revolved the subject in my thoughts ever since you first mentioned your wish to obtain a situation. You know I at present reside with Miss Keeldar in the capacity of companion: should she marry (and that she *will* marry ere long, many circumstances induce me to conclude), I shall cease to be necessary to her in that capacity. I must tell you that I possess a small independency, arising partly from my own savings, and partly from a legacy left me some years since; whenever I leave Fieldhead, I shall take a house of my own: I could not endure to live in solitude: I have no relations whom I care to invite to close intimacy; for, as you must have observed, and as I have already avowed, my habits and tastes have their peculiarities: to you, my dear, I need not say I am attached; with you I am happier than I have ever been with any living thing" (this was said with marked emphasis). "Your society I

should esteem a very dear privilege—an inestimable privilege, a comfort, a blessing. You shall come to me then. Caroline, do you refuse me? I hope you can love me?”

And with these two abrupt questions she stopped.

“Indeed, I *do* love you,” was the reply. “I should like to live with you: but you are too kind.”

“All I have,” went on Mrs. Pryor, “I would leave to you: you should be provided for, but never again say I am *too kind*. You pierce my heart, child!”

“But, my dear madam—this generosity—I have no claim——”

“Hush! you must not talk about it: there are some things we cannot bear to hear. Oh! it is late to begin, but I may yet live a few years: I can never wipe out the past, but perhaps a brief space in the future may yet be mine!”

Mrs. Pryor seemed deeply agitated: large tears trembled in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. Caroline kissed her, in her gentle caressing way, saying softly—

“I love you dearly. Don’t cry.”

But the lady’s whole frame seemed shaken: she sat down, bent her head to her knee and wept aloud. Nothing could console her till the inward storm had had its way. At last the agony subsided of itself.

“Poor thing!” she murmured, returning Caroline’s kiss: “poor lonely lamb! But come,” she added abruptly; “come, we must go home.”

For a short distance Mrs. Pryor walked very fast: by degrees, however, she calmed down to her wonted manner, fell into her usual characteristic pace,—a peculiar one like all her movements,—and by the time they reached Fieldhead, she had re-entered into herself: the outside was, as usual, still and shy.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO LIVES.

ONLY half of Moore's activity and resolution had been seen in his defence of the mill : he shewed the other half (and a terrible half it was) in the indefatigable, the relentless assiduity with which he pursued the leaders of the riot. The mob, the mere followers, he let alone : perhaps an innate sense of justice told him that men misled by false counsel, and goaded by privations, are not fit objects of vengeance, and that he who would visit an even violent act on the bent head of suffering, is a tyrant, not a judge. At all events, though he knew many of the number, having recognised them during the latter part of the attack when day began to dawn, he let them daily pass him on street and road without notice or threat.

The leaders he did not know. They were strangers : emissaries from the large towns. Most of these were not members of the operative class :

they were chiefly “down-draughts,” bankrupts, men always in debt and often in drink—men who had nothing to lose, and much—in the way of character, cash, and cleanliness—to gain. These persons Moore hunted like any sleuth-hound; and well he liked the occupation: its excitement was of a kind pleasant to his nature: he liked it better than making cloth.

His horse must have hated these times, for it was ridden both hard and often: he almost lived on the road, and the fresh air was as welcome to his lungs as the policeman’s quest to his mood: he preferred it to the steam of dye-houses. The magistrates of the district must have dreaded him: they were slow, timid men; he liked both to frighten and to rouse them. He liked to force them to betray a certain fear, which made them alike falter in resolve and recoil in action—the fear, simply, of assassination. This, indeed, was the dread which had hitherto hampered every manufacturer, and almost every public man in the district. Helstone alone had ever repelled it. The old Cossack knew well he might be shot: he knew there was risk; but such death had for his nerves no terrors: it would have been his chosen—might he have had a choice.

Moore likewise knew his danger: the result was an unquenchable scorn of the quarter whence such danger was to be apprehended. The consciousness

that he hunted assassins was the spur in his high-mettled temper's flank. As for fear, he was too proud—too hard-nurtured—(if you will)—too phlegmatic a man to fear. Many a time he rode belated over moors, moonlit or moonless as the case might be, with feelings far more elate, faculties far better refreshed, than when safety and stagnation environed him in the counting-house. Four was the number of the leaders to be accounted for: two, in the course of a fortnight, were brought to bay near Stilbro'; the remaining two it was necessary to seek further off: their haunts were supposed to lie near Birmingham.

Meantime, the clothier did not neglect his battered mill: its reparation was esteemed a light task; carpenters' and glaziers' work alone being needed. The rioters not having succeeded in effecting an entrance, his grim, metal darlings—the machines—had escaped damage.

Whether, during this busy life—whether, while stern justice and exacting business claimed his energies and harassed his thoughts—he now and then gave one moment, dedicated one effort, to keep alive gentler fires than those which smoulder in the fane of Nemesis, it was not easy to discover. He seldom went near Fieldhead; if he did, his visits were brief: if he called at the Rectory, it was only to hold conferences with the Rector in his study. He maintained his rigid course very steadily. Meantime, the history of

the year continued troubled: there was no lull in the tempest of war; her long hurricane still swept the Continent. There was not the faintest sign of serene weather: no opening amid "the clouds of battle-dust and smoke;" no fall of pure dews genial to the olive; no cessation of the red rain which nourishes the baleful and glorious laurel. Meantime, Ruin had her sappers and miners at work under Moore's feet, and whether he rode or walked—whether he only crossed his counting-house hearth, or galloped over sullen Rushedge—he was aware of a hollow echo, and felt the ground shake to his tread.

While the summer thus passed with Moore, how did it lapse with Shirley and Caroline? Let us first visit the heiress. How does she look? Like a love-lorn maiden, pale and pining for a neglectful swain? Does she sit the day long bent over some sedentary task? Has she for ever a book in her hand, or sewing on her knee, and eyes only for that, and words for nothing, and thoughts unspoken?

By no means. Shirley is all right. If her wistful cast of physiognomy is not gone, no more is her careless smile. She keeps her dark old manor-house light and bright with her cheery presence: the gallery, and the low-ceiled chambers that open into it, have learned lively echoes from her voice: the dim entrance-hall, with its one window, has grown pleasantly accustomed to the frequent rustle of a silk

dress, as its wearer sweeps across from room to room, now carrying flowers to the barbarous peach-bloom salon, now entering the dining-room to open its casements and let in the scent of mignonette and sweet-briar, anon bringing plants from the staircase-window to place in the sun at the open porch-door.

She takes her sewing occasionally ; but, by some fatality, she is doomed never to sit steadily at it for above five minutes at a time : her thimble is scarcely fitted on, her needle scarce threaded, when a sudden thought calls her up-stairs : perhaps she goes to seek some just-then-remembered old ivory-backed needle-book, or older china-topped workbox, quite unneeded, but which seems at the moment indispensable ; perhaps to arrange her hair, or a drawer which she recollects to have seen that morning in a state of curious confusion ; perhaps only to take a peep from a particular window at a particular view, whence Briarfield Church and Rectory are visible, pleasantly bowered in trees. She has scarcely returned, and again taken up the slip of cambric, or square of half-wrought canvass, when Tartar's bold scrape and strangled whistle are heard at the porch-door, and she must run to open it for him ; it is a hot day ; he comes in panting ; she must convoy him to the kitchen, and see with her own eyes that his water-bowl is replenished. Through the open kitchen-door the court is visible, all sunny and gay, and

peopled with turkeys and their poults, peahens and their chicks, pearl-flecked Guinea fowls, and a bright variety of pure white, and purple-necked, and blue and cinnamon-plumed pigeons. Irresistible spectacle to Shirley! She runs to the pantry for a roll, and she stands on the door-step scattering crumbs: around her throng her eager, plump, happy, feathered vassals. John is about the stables, and John must be talked to, and her mare looked at. She is still petting and patting it, when the cows come in to be milked: this is important; Shirley must stay and take a review of them all. There are perhaps some little calves, some little new-yeaned lambs—it may be twins, whose mothers have rejected them: Miss Keeldar must be introduced to them by John—must permit herself the treat of feeding them with her own hand, under the direction of her careful foreman. Meantime, John moots doubtful questions about the farming of certain “crofts,” and “ings,” and “holms,” and his mistress is necessitated to fetch her garden-hat—a gipsy-straw—and accompany him, over stile and along hedgerow, to hear the conclusion of the whole agricultural matter on the spot, and with the said “crofts,” “ings,” and “holms” under her eye. Bright afternoon thus wears into soft evening, and she comes home to a late tea, and after tea she never sews.

After tea Shirley reads, and she is just about as

tenacious of her book as she is lax of her needle. Her study is the rug, her seat a foot-stool, or perhaps only the carpet at Mrs. Pryor's feet—there she always learned her lessons when a child, and old habits have a strong power over her. The tawny and lion-like bulk of Tartar is ever stretched beside her; his negro muzzle laid on his fore paws, straight, strong, and shapely as the limbs of an Alpine wolf. One hand of the mistress generally reposes on the loving serf's rude head, because if she takes it away he groans and is discontented. Shirley's mind is given to her book; she lifts not her eyes; she neither stirs nor speaks: unless, indeed, it be to return a brief respectful answer to Mrs. Pryor, who addresses deprecatory phrases to her now and then.

“My dear, you had better not have that great dog so near you: he is crushing the border of your dress.”

“Oh, it is only muslin: I can put a clean one on to-morrow.”

“My dear, I wish you could acquire the habit of sitting to a table when you read.”

“I will try, ma'am, some time; but it is so comfortable to do as one has always been accustomed to do.”

“My dear, let me beg of you to put that book down: you are trying your eyes by the doubtful firelight.”

“No, ma’am, not at all: my eyes are never tired.”

At last, however, a pale light falls on the page from the window: she looks, the moon is up; she closes the volume, rises, and walks through the room. Her book has perhaps been a good one; it has refreshed, refilled, rewarmed her heart; it has set her brain astir, furnished her mind with pictures. The still parlour, the clean hearth, the window opening on the twilight sky, and showing its “sweet regent,” new throned and glorious, suffice to make earth an Eden, life a poem, for Shirley. A still, deep, inborn delight glows in her young veins; unmingled—untroubled; not to be reached or ravished by human agency, because by no human agency bestowed: the pure gift of God to His creature, the free dower of Nature to her child. This joy gives her experience of a genii-life. Buoyant, by green steps, by glad hills, all verdure and light, she reaches a station scarcely lower than that whence angels looked down on the dreamer of Beth-el, and her eye seeks, and her soul possesses, the vision of life as she wishes it. No—not as she wishes it: she has not time to wish: the swift glory spreads out, sweeping and kindling, and multiplies its splendours faster than Thought can effect his combinations, faster than Aspiration can utter her longings. Shirley says nothing while the trance is upon her—she is quite

mute; but if Mrs. Pryor speaks to her now, she goes out quietly, and continues her walk up-stairs in the dim gallery.

If Shirley were not an indolent, a reckless, an ignorant being, she would take a pen at such moments; or at least while the recollection of such moments was yet fresh on her spirit: she would seize, she would fix the apparition, tell the vision revealed. Had she a little more of the organ of Acquisitiveness in her head—a little more of the love of property in her nature, she would take a good-sized sheet of paper and write plainly out, in her own queer but clear and legible hand, the story that has been narrated, the song that has been sung to her, and thus possess what she was enabled to create. But indolent she is, reckless she is, and most ignorant, for she does not know her dreams are rare—her feelings peculiar: she does not know, has never known, and will die without knowing, the full value of that spring whose bright fresh bubbling in her heart keeps it green.

Shirley takes life easily: is not that fact written in her eye? In her good-tempered moments, is it not as full of lazy softness as in her brief fits of anger it is fulgent with quick-flashing fire? Her nature is in her eye: so long as she is calm, indolence, indulgence, humour, and tenderness possess that large gray sphere: incense her,—a red

ray pierces the dew,—it quickens instantly to flame.

Ere the month of July was passed, Miss Keeldar would probably have started with Caroline on that northern tour they had planned; but just at that epoch an invasion befell Fieldhead: a genteel foraging party besieged Shirley in her castle, and compelled her to surrender at discretion. An uncle, an aunt, and two cousins from the south, a Mr., Mrs., and two Misses Sympson, of Sympson Grove, —shire, came down upon her in state. The laws of hospitality obliged her to give in, which she did with a facility which somewhat surprised Caroline, who knew her to be prompt in action and fertile in expedient, where a victory was to be gained for her will. Miss Helstone even asked her how it was she submitted so readily?—she answered, old feelings had their power: she had passed two years of her early youth at Sympson Grove.

“How did she like her relatives?”

She had nothing in common with them, she replied: little Harry Sympson, indeed, the sole son of the family, was very unlike his sisters, and of him she had formerly been fond; but he was not coming to Yorkshire: at least, not yet.

The next Sunday the Fieldhead pew in Briarfield church appeared peopled with a prim, trim, fidgety, elderly gentleman, who shifted his spectacles and

changed his position every three minutes; a patient, placid-looking elderly lady, in brown satin, and two pattern young ladies, in pattern attire, with pattern deportment. Shirley had the air of a black swan, or a white crow, in the midst of this party; and very forlorn was her aspect. Having brought her into respectable society, we will leave her there a while, and look after Miss Helstone.

Separated from Miss Keeldar for the present, as she could not seek her in the midst of her fine relatives; scared away from Fieldhead by the visiting commotion which the new arrivals occasioned in the neighbourhood, Caroline was limited once more to the gray Rectory; the solitary morning walk in remote byepaths; the long, lonely afternoon sitting in a quiet parlour which the sun forsook at noon, or in the garden alcove where it shone bright, yet sad, on the ripening red currants trained over the trellis, and on the fair monthly roses entwined between, and through them fell chequered on Caroline sitting in her white summer dress, still as a garden statue. There she read old books, taken from her uncle's library: the Greek and Latin were of no use to her; and its collection of light literature was chiefly contained on a shelf which had belonged to her aunt Mary: some venerable Lady's Magazines, that had once performed a sea-voyage with their owner, and undergone a storm, and whose pages were stained

with salt water; some mad Methodist Magazines, full of miracles and apparitions, of preternatural warnings, ominous dreams, and frenzied fanaticism; the equally mad Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe from the Dead to the Living; a few old English Classics:—from these faded flowers Caroline had in her childhood extracted the honey,—they were tasteless to her now. By way of change, and also of doing good, she would sew: make garments for the poor, according to good Miss Ainley's direction. Sometimes, as she felt and saw her tears fall slowly on her work, she would wonder how the excellent woman who had cut it out and arranged it for her, managed to be so equably serene in *her* solitude.

“I never find Miss Ainley oppressed with despondency, or lost in grief,” she thought; “yet her cottage is a still, dim little place, and she is without a bright hope or near friend in the world. I remember, though, she told me once, she had tutored her thoughts to tend upwards to Heaven. She allowed there was, and ever had been, little enjoyment in this world for her; and she looks, I suppose, to the bliss of the world to come. So do nuns—with their close cell, their iron lamp, their robe strait as a shroud, their bed narrow as a coffin. She says, often, she has no fear of death—no dread of the grave: no more, doubtless, had St. Simeon Stylites, lifted up terrible on his wild column in the wilder-

ness: no more has the Hindoo votary stretched on his couch of iron spikes. Both these having violated nature, their natural likings and antipathies are reversed: they grow altogether morbid. I do fear death as yet, but I believe it is because I am young: poor Miss Ainley would cling closer to life, if life had more charms for her. God surely did not create us, and cause us to live, with the sole end of wishing always to die. I believe, in my heart, we were intended to prize life and enjoy it, so long as we retain it. Existence never was originally meant to be that useless, blank, pale, slow-trailing thing it often becomes to many, and is becoming to me, among the rest.

“Nobody,” she went on—“nobody in particular is to blame, that I can see, for the state in which things are; and I cannot tell, however much I puzzle over it, how they are to be altered for the better; but I feel there is something wrong somewhere. I believe single women should have more to do—better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now. And when I speak thus, I have no impression that I displease God by my words; that I am either impious or impatient, irreligious or sacrilegious. My consolation is, indeed, that God hears many a groan, and compassionates much grief which man stops his ears against, or frowns on with impotent contempt. I say *impotent*, for I observe

that to such grievances as society cannot readily cure, it usually forbids utterance, on pain of its scorn: this scorn being only a sort of tinselled cloak to its deformed weakness. People hate to be reminded of ills they are unable or unwilling to remedy: such reminder, in forcing on them a sense of their own incapacity, or a more painful sense of an obligation to make some unpleasant effort, troubles their ease and shakes their self-complacency. Old maids, like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world: the demand disturbs the happy and rich: it disturbs parents. Look at the numerous families of girls in this neighbourhood: the Armitages, the Birtwhistles, the Sykes. The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do: their sisters have no earthly employment, but household work and sewing; no earthly pleasure, but an unprofitable visiting; and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health: they are never well; and their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness. The great wish—the sole aim of every one of them is to be married, but the majority will never marry: they will die as they now live. They scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands. The gentlemen turn them into ridicule: they don't want them; they

hold them very cheap: they say—I have heard them say it with sneering laughs many a time—the matrimonial market is overstocked. Fathers say so likewise, and are angry with their daughters when they observe their manœuvres: they order them to stay at home. What do they expect them to do at home? If you ask,—they would answer, sew and cook. They expect them to do this, and this only, contentedly, regularly, uncomplainingly all their lives long, as if they had no germs of faculties for anything else: a doctrine as reasonable to hold, as it would be that the fathers have no faculties but for eating what their daughters cook, or for wearing what they sew. Could men live so themselves? Would they not be very weary? And, when there came no relief to their weariness, but only reproaches at its slightest manifestation, would not their weariness ferment in time to phrenzy? Lucretia, spinning at midnight in the midst of her maidens, and Solomon's virtuous woman, are often quoted as patterns of what 'the sex' (as they say) ought to be. I don't know: Lucretia, I daresay, was a most worthy sort of person, much like my cousin Hortense Moore; but she kept her servants up very late. I should not have liked to be amongst the number of the maidens. Hortense would just work me and Sarah in that fashion, if she could, and neither of us would bear it. The 'virtuous woman,' again, had her

household up in the very middle of the night; she ‘got breakfast over’ (as Mrs. Sykes says) before one o’clock A.M.; but *she* had something more to do than spin and give out portions: she was a manufacturer—she made fine linen and sold it: she was an agriculturist—she bought estates and planted vineyards. *That* woman was a manager: she was what the matrons hereabouts call ‘a clever woman.’ On the whole, I like her a good deal better than Lucretia; but I don’t believe either Mr. Armitage or Mr. Sykes could have got the advantage of her in a bargain: yet, I like her. ‘Strength and honour were her clothing: the heart of her husband safely trusted in her. She opened her mouth with wisdom; in her tongue was the law of kindness: her children rose up and called her blessed; her husband also praised her.’ King of Israel! your model of a woman is a worthy model! But are we, in these days, brought up to be like her? Men of Yorkshire! do your daughters reach this royal standard? Can they reach it? Can you help them to reach it? Can you give them a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow? Men of England! look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you, dropping off in consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids,—envious, backbiting, wretched, because life is a desert to them; or, what is worst of all, reduced to strive,

by scarce modest coquetry and debasing artifice, to gain that position and consideration by marriage, which to celibacy is denied. Fathers! cannot you alter these things? Perhaps not all at once; but consider the matter well when it is brought before you, receive it as a theme worthy of thought: do not dismiss it with an idle jest or an unmanly insult. You would wish to be proud of your daughters and not to blush for them—then seek for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manœuvrer, the mischief-making tale-bearer. Keep your girls' minds narrow and fettered—they will still be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you: cultivate them—give them scope and work—they will be your gayest companions in health; your tenderest nurses in sickness; your most faithful prop in age.”

CHAPTER XII.

AN EVENING OUT.

ONE fine summer day that Caroline had spent entirely alone (her uncle being at Whinbury), and whose long, bright, noiseless, breezeless, cloudless hours (how many they seemed since sunrise!) had been to her as desolate as if they had gone over her head in the shadowless and trackless wastes of Zahara, instead of in the blooming garden of an English home, she was sitting in the alcove,—her task of work on her knee, her fingers assiduously plying the needle, her eyes following and regulating their movements, her brain working restlessly,—when Fanny came to the door, looked round over the lawn and borders, and not seeing her whom she sought, called out—“Miss Caroline!”

A low voice answered—“Fanny!” It issued from the alcove, and thither Fanny hastened—a note in her hand, which she delivered to fingers that hardly seemed to have nerve to hold it. Miss

Helstone did not ask whence it came, and she did not look at it: she let it drop amongst the folds of her work.

“Jce Scott’s son, Harry, brought it,” said Fanny.

The girl was no enchantress, and knew no magic-spell, yet what she said took almost magical effect on her young mistress: she lifted her head with the quick motion of revived sensation; she shot—not a languid, but a life-like, questioning glance at Fanny.

“Harry Scott! Who sent him?”

“He came from the Hollow.”

The dropped note was snatched up eagerly—the seal was broken: it was read in two seconds. An affectionate billet from Hortense, informing her young cousin that she was returned from Wormwood Wells; that she was alone to-day, as Robert was gone to Whinbury market; that nothing would give her greater pleasure than to have Caroline’s company to tea; and—the good lady added—she was sure such a change would be most acceptable and beneficial to Caroline, who must be sadly at a loss both for safe guidance and improving society since the misunderstanding between Robert and Mr. Helstone had occasioned a separation from her “*meilleure amie, Hortense Gérard Moore.*” In a postscript, she was urged to put on her bonnet and run down directly.

Caroline did not need the injunction: glad was she to lay by the brown holland child's-slip she was trimming with braid for the Jew's-basket, to hasten up-stairs, cover her curls with her straw bonnet, and throw round her shoulders the black silk scarf, whose simple drapery suited as well her shape as its dark hue set off the purity of her dress and the fairness of her face; glad was she to escape for a few hours the solitude, the sadness, the nightmare of her life; glad to run down the green lane sloping to the Hollow, to scent the fragrance of hedge-flowers sweeter than the perfume of moss-rose or lily. True, she knew Robert was not at the cottage; but it was delight to go where he had lately been: so long, so totally separated from him, merely to see his home, to enter the room where he had that morning sat, felt like a reunion. As such it revived her; and then Illusion was again following her in Peri-mask: the soft agitation of wings caressed her cheek, and the air, breathing from the blue summer sky, bore a voice which whispered—"Robert may come home while you are in his house; and then, at least, you may look in his face—at least you may give him your hand: perhaps, for a minute, you may sit beside him."

"Silence!" was her austere response: but she loved the comforter and the consolation.

Miss Moore probably caught from the window the

gleam and flutter of Caroline's white attire through the branchy garden-shrubs, for she advanced from the cottage-porch to meet her. Straight, unbending, phlegmatic as usual, she came on: no haste or ecstasy was ever permitted to disorder the dignity of *her* movements; but she smiled, well pleased to mark the delight of her pupil, to feel her kiss, and the gentle, genial strain of her embrace. She led her tenderly in—half-deceived and wholly flattered. Half-deceived! had it not been so, she would in all probability have put her to the wicket, and shut her out. Had she known clearly to whose account the chief share of this child-like joy was to be placed, Hortense would most likely have felt both shocked and incensed. Sisters do not like young ladies to fall in love with their brothers: it seems, if not presumptuous, silly, weak, a delusion, an absurd mistake. *They* do not love these gentlemen—whatever sisterly affection they may cherish towards them—and that others should, repels them with a sense of crude romance. The first movement, in short, excited by such discovery (as with many parents on finding their children to be in love), is one of mixed impatience and contempt. Reason—if they be rational people—corrects the false feeling in time; but if they be irrational, it is never corrected, and the daughter or sister-in-law is disliked to the end.

“You would expect to find me alone, from what

I said in my note," observed Miss Moore, as she conducted Caroline towards the parlour; "but it was written this morning: since dinner, company has come in."

And opening the door, she made visible an ample spread of crimson skirts overflowing the elbow-chair at the fireside, and above them, presiding with dignity, a cap more awful than a crown. That cap had never come to the cottage under a bonnet: no, it had been brought in a vast bag, or rather a middle-sized balloon of black silk, held wide with whalebone. The screed, or frill of the cap, stood a quarter of a yard broad round the face of the wearer: the ribbon, flourishing in puffs and bows about the head, was of the sort called love-ribbon: there was a good deal of it,—I may say, a very great deal. Mrs. Yorke wore the cap—it became her: she wore the gown also—it suited her no less.

That great lady was come in a friendly way to take tea with Miss Moore. It was almost as great and as rare a favour as if the Queen were to go uninvited to share pot-luck with one of her subjects: a higher mark of distinction she could not show,—she who, in general, scorned visiting and tea-drinking, and held cheap, and stigmatized as "gossips," every maid and matron of the vicinage.

There was no mistake, however; Miss Moore *was* a favourite with her: she had evinced the fact more

than once; evinced it by stopping to speak to her in the churchyard on Sundays; by inviting her, almost hospitably, to come to Briarmains; evinced it to-day by the grand condescension of a personal visit. Her reasons for the preference, as assigned by herself, were, that Miss Moore was a woman of steady deportment, without the least levity of conversation or carriage; also, that, being a foreigner, she must feel the want of a friend to countenance her. She might have added that her plain aspect, homely precise dress, and phlegmatic unattractive manner were, to her, so many additional recommendations. It is certain, at least, that ladies remarkable for the opposite qualities of beauty, lively bearing, and elegant taste in attire, were not often favoured with her approbation. Whatever gentlemen are apt to admire in women, Mrs. Yorke condemned; and what they overlook or despise, she patronized.

Caroline advanced to the mighty matron with some sense of diffidence: she knew little of Mrs. Yorke; and, as a parson's niece, was doubtful what sort of a reception she might get. She got a very cool one, and was glad to hide her discomfiture by turning away to take off her bonnet. Nor, upon sitting down, was she displeased to be immediately accosted by a little personage in a blue frock and sash, who started up like some fairy from the side of the great dame's chair, where she had been sitting on a foot-stool,

screened from view by the folds of the wide red gown, and running to Miss Helstone, unceremoniously threw her arms round her neck and demanded a kiss.

“My mother is not civil to you,” said the petitioner, as she received and repaid a smiling salute; “and Rose, there, takes no notice of you: it is their way. If, instead of you, a white angel, with a crown of stars, had come into the room, mother would nod stiffly, and Rose never lift her head at all; but I will be your friend: I have always liked you!”

“Jessie, curb that tongue of yours, and repress your forwardness!” said Mrs. Yorke.

“But, mother, you are so frozen!” expostulated Jessie. “Miss Helstone has never done you any harm: why can’t you be kind to her? You sit so stiff, and look so cold, and speak so dry: what for? That’s just the fashion in which you treat Miss Shirley Keeldar, and every other young lady who comes to our house. And Rose, there, is such an aut—aut—I have forgotten the word, but it means a machine in the shape of a human being. However, between you, you will drive every soul away from Briarmains,—Martin often says so!”

“I am an automaton? Good! Let me alone then,” said Rose, speaking from a corner where she was sitting on the carpet at the foot of a bookcase,

with a volume spread open on her knee. "Miss Helstone—how do you do?" she added, directing a brief glance to the person addressed, and then again casting down her gray, remarkable eyes on the book, and returning to the study of its pages.

Caroline stole a quiet gaze towards her, dwelling on her young, absorbed countenance, and observing a certain unconscious movement of the mouth as she read,—a movement full of character. Caroline had tact, and she had fine instinct: she felt that Rose Yorke was a peculiar child,—one of the unique: she knew how to treat her. Approaching quietly, she knelt on the carpet at her side, and looked over her little shoulder at her book. It was a romance of Mrs. Radcliffe's—"The Italian."

Caroline read on with her, making no remark: presently Rose showed her the attention of asking, ere she turned a leaf,—

"Are you ready?"

Caroline only nodded.

"Do you like it?" inquired Rose, ere long.

"Long since, when I read it as a child, I was wonderfully taken with it."

"Why?"

"It seemed to open with such promise,—such foreboding of a most strange tale to be unfolded."

"And in reading it, you feel as if you were far

away from England,—really in Italy—under another sort of sky,—that blue sky of the south which travellers describe.”

“ You are sensible of that, Rose ? ”

“ It makes me long to travel, Miss Helstone.”

“ When you are a woman, perhaps, you may be able to gratify your wish.”

“ I mean to make a way to do so, if one is not made for me. I cannot live always in Briarfield. The whole world is not very large compared with creation: I must see the outside of our own round planet at least.”

“ How much of its outside ? ”

“ First this hemisphere where we live; then the other. I am resolved that my life shall be a life: not a black trance like the toad’s, buried in marble; nor a long, slow death like yours in Briarfield Rectory.”

“ Like mine! What can you mean, child ? ”

“ Might you not as well be tediously dying, as for ever shut up in that glebe-house—a place that, when I pass it, always reminds me of a windowed grave? I never see any movement about the door: I never hear a sound from the wall: I believe smoke never issues from the chimneys. What do you do there ? ”

“ I sew, I read, I learn lessons.”

“ Are you happy ? ”

“Should I be happier wandering alone in strange countries, as you wish to do?”

“Much happier, even if you did nothing but wander. Remember, however, that I shall have an object in view: but if you only went on and on, like some enchanted lady in a fairy tale, you might be happier than now. In a day’s wandering, you would pass many a hill, wood, and watercourse, each perpetually altering in aspect as the sun shone out or was overcast; as the weather was wet or fair, dark or bright. Nothing changes in Briarfield Rectory: the plaster of the parlour-ceilings, the paper on the walls, the curtains, carpets, chairs are still the same.”

“Is change necessary to happiness?”

“Yes.”

“Is it synonymous with it?”

“I don’t know; but I feel monotony and death to be almost the same.”

Here Jessie spoke.

“Isn’t she mad?” she asked.

“But, Rose,” pursued Caroline, “I fear a wanderer’s life, for me at least, would end like that tale you are reading, — in disappointment, vanity, and vexation of spirit.”

“Does ‘the Italian’ so end?”

“I thought so when I read it.”

“Better to try all things and find all empty,

than to try nothing and leave your life a blank. To do this is to commit the sin of him who buried his talent in a napkin—despicable sluggard!”

“Rose,” observed Mrs. Yorke, “solid satisfaction is only to be realized by doing one’s duty.”

“Right, mother! And if my Master has given me ten talents, my duty is to trade with them, and make them ten talents more. Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be interred. I will *not* deposit it in a broken-spouted tea-pot, and shut it up in a china-closet among tea-things. I will *not* commit it to your work-table to be smothered in piles of woollen hose. I will *not* prison it in the linen-press to find shrouds among the sheets: and least of all, mother—(she got up from the floor)—least of all, will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes, to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry, and ham on the shelves of the larder.”

She stopped—then went on:—

“Mother, the Lord who gave each of us our talents will come home some day, and will demand from all an account. The tea-pot, the old stocking-foot, the linen rag, the willow-pattern tureen will yield up their barren deposit in many a house: suffer your daughters, at least, to put their money to the exchangers, that they may be enabled at the Master’s coming to pay him his own with usury.”

“ Rose, did you bring your sampler with you, as I told you ? ”

“ Yes, mother. ”

“ Sit down, and do a line of marking. ”

Rose sat down promptly, and wrought according to orders. After a busy pause of ten minutes, her mother asked—

“ Do you think yourself oppressed now ? A victim ? ”

“ No, mother. ”

“ Yet, as far as I understood your tirade, it was a protest against all womanly and domestic employment. ”

“ You misunderstood it, mother. I should be sorry not to learn to sew : you do right to teach me, and to make me work. ”

“ Even to the mending of your brother’s stockings and the making of sheets ? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ Where is the use of ranting and spouting about it, then ? ”

“ Am I to do nothing but that ? I will do that, and then I will do more. Now, mother, I have said my say. I am twelve years old at present, and not till I am sixteen will I speak again about talents : for four years, I bind myself an industrious apprentice to all you can teach me. ”

“ You see what my daughters are, Miss Helstone, ”

observed Mrs. Yorke: "how precociously wise in their own conceits! 'I would rather this—I prefer that;' such is Jessie's cuckoo-song: while Rose utters the bolder cry, 'I *will*, and I will *not*!'"

"I render a reason, mother: besides, if my cry is bold, it is only heard once in a twelvemonth. About each birthday, the spirit moves me to deliver one oracle respecting my own instruction and management: I utter it and leave it; it is for you, mother, to listen or not."

"I would advise all young ladies," pursued Mrs. Yorke, "to study the characters of such children as they chance to meet with before they marry, and have any of their own; to consider well how they would like the responsibility of guiding the careless, the labour of persuading the stubborn, the constant burden and task of training the best."

"But with love it need not be so very difficult," interposed Caroline. "Mothers love their children most dearly—almost better than they love themselves."

"Fine talk! Very sentimental! There is the rough, practical part of life yet to come for you, young Miss!"

"But, Mrs. Yorke, if I take a little baby into my arms—any poor woman's infant for instance,—I feel that I love that helpless thing quite peculiarly, though I am not its mother. I could do almost

anything for it willingly, if it were delivered over entirely to my care—if it were quite dependent on me.”

“ You *feel!* Yes! yes! I daresay, now : you are led a great deal by your *feelings*, and you think yourself a very sensitive, refined personage, no doubt. Are you aware that, with all these romantic ideas, you have managed to train your features into an habitually lackadaisical expression, better suited to a novel-heroine than to a woman who is to make her way in the real world, by dint of common sense ? ”

“ No ; I am not at all aware of that, Mrs. Yorke.”

“ Look in the glass just behind you. Compare the face you see there with that of any early-rising, hard-working milkmaid.”

“ My face is a pale one, but it is *not* sentimental, and most milkmaids, however red and robust they may be, are more stupid and less practically fitted to make their way in the world than I am. I think more and more correctly than milkmaids in general do ; consequently, where they would often, for want of reflection, act weakly, I, by dint of reflection, should act judiciously.”

“ Oh, no ! you would be influenced by your feelings. You would be guided by impulse.”

“ Of course, I should often be influenced by my feelings : they were given me to that end. Whom

my feelings teach me to love, I *must* and *shall* love; and I hope, if ever I have a husband and children, my feelings will induce me to love them. I hope, in that case, all my impulses will be strong in compelling me to love."

Caroline had a pleasure in saying this with emphasis: she had a pleasure in daring to say it in Mrs. Yorke's presence. She did not care what unjust sarcasm might be hurled at her in reply: she flushed, not with anger, but excitement, when the ungenial matron answered coolly,—

"Don't waste your dramatic effects. That was well said,—it was quite fine; but it is lost on two women—an old wife and an old maid: there should have been a disengaged gentleman present. Is Mr. Robert nowhere hid behind the curtains, do you think, Miss Moore?"

Hortense, who during the chief part of the conversation had been in the kitchen superintending the preparations for tea, did not yet quite comprehend the drift of the discourse. She answered, with a puzzled air, that Robert was at Whinbury. Mrs. Yorke laughed her own peculiar short laugh.

"Straightforward Miss Moore!" said she, patronizingly. "It is like you to understand my question so literally, and answer it so simply. *Your* mind comprehends nothing of intrigue. Strange things might go on around you without your being the

wiser: you are not of the class the world calls sharpwitted."

These equivocal compliments did not seem to please Hortense. She drew herself up, puckered her black eyebrows, but still looked puzzled.

"I have ever been noted for sagacity and discernment from childhood," she returned: for, indeed, on the possession of these qualities, she peculiarly piqued herself.

"You never plotted to win a husband, I'll be bound," pursued Mrs. Yorke; "and you have not the benefit of previous experience to aid you in discovering when others plot."

Caroline felt this kind language where the benevolent speaker intended she should feel it—in her very heart. She could not even parry the shafts: she was defenceless for the present: to answer would have been to avow that the cap fitted. Mrs. Yorke, looking at her as she sat with troubled downcast eyes, and cheek burning painfully, and figure expressing in its bent attitude and unconscious tremor all the humiliation and chagrin she experienced, felt the sufferer was fair game. The strange woman had a natural antipathy to a shrinking, sensitive character—a nervous temperament: nor was a pretty, delicate, and youthful face a passport to her affections. It was seldom she met with all these obnoxious qualities combined in one indi-

vidual: still more seldom she found that individual at her mercy, under circumstances in which she could crush her well. She happened, this afternoon, to be specially bilious and morose: as much disposed to gore as any vicious "mother of the herd:" lowering her large head, she made a new charge.

"Your cousin Hortense is an excellent sister, Miss Helstone: such ladies as come to try their life's luck here, at Hollow's cottage, may, by a very little clever female artifice, cajole the mistress of the house, and have the game all in their own hands. You are fond of your cousin's society, I dare say, Miss?"

"Of which cousin's?"

"Oh, of the lady's, *of course.*"

"Hortense is and always has been most kind to me."

"Every sister, with an eligible single brother, is considered most kind by her spinster friends."

"Mrs. Yorke," said Caroline, lifting her eyes slowly, their blue orbs at the same time clearing from trouble, and shining steady and full, while the glow of shame left her cheek, and its hue turned pale and settled: "Mrs. Yorke, may I ask what you mean?"

"To give you a lesson on the cultivation of rectitude: to disgust you with craft and false sentiment."

"Do I need this lesson?"

“Most young ladies of the present day need it. You are quite a modern young lady—morbid, delicate, professing to like retirement; which implies, I suppose, that you find little worthy of your sympathies in the ordinary world. The ordinary world—everyday, honest folks—are better than you think them: much better than any bookish, romancing chit of a girl can be, who hardly ever puts her nose over her uncle, the parson’s, garden-wall.”

“Consequently, of whom you know nothing. Excuse me,—indeed, it does not matter whether you excuse me or not—you have attacked me without provocation: I shall defend myself without apology. Of my relations with my two cousins, you are ignorant: in a fit of ill-humour, you have attempted to poison them by gratuitous insinuations, which are far more crafty and false than anything with which you can justly charge me. That I happen to be pale, and sometimes to look diffident, is no business of yours. That I am fond of books, and indisposed for common gossip, is still less your business. That I am a ‘romancing chit of a girl’ is a mere conjecture on your part: I never romanced to you, nor to anybody you know. That I am the parson’s niece is not a crime, though you may be narrow-minded enough to think it so. You dislike me: you have no just reason for disliking me; therefore keep the expression of your aversion to yourself. If at any time, in future,

you evince it annoyingly, I shall answer even less scrupulously than I have done now."

She ceased, and sat in white and still excitement. She had spoken in the clearest of tones, neither fast nor loud; but her silver accents thrilled the ear. The speed of the current in her veins was just then as swift as it was viewless.

Mrs. Yorke was not irritated at the reproof, worded with a severity so simple, dictated by a pride so quiet. Turning coolly to Miss Moore, she said, nodding her cap approvingly:—

"She has spirit in her, after all. Always speak as honestly as you have done just now," she continued, "and you'll do."

"I repel a recommendation so offensive," was the answer, delivered in the same pure key, with the same clear look. "I reject counsel poisoned by insinuation. It is my right to speak as I think proper: nothing binds me to converse as you dictate. So far from always speaking as I have done just now, I shall never address any one in a tone so stern, or in language so harsh, unless in answer to unprovoked insult."

"Mother, you have found your match," pronounced little Jessie, whom the scene appeared greatly to edify. Rose had heard the whole with an unmoved face. She now said,—

"No: Miss Helstone is not my mother's match—

for she allows herself to be vexed: my mother would wear her out in a few weeks. Shirley Keeldar manages better. Mother, you have never hurt Miss Keeldar's feelings yet. She wears armour under her silk dress that you cannot penetrate."

Mrs. Yorke often complained that her children were mutinous. It was strange, that with all her strictness, with all her "strongmindedness," she could gain no command over them: a look from their father had more influence with them than a lecture from her.

Miss Moore—to whom the position of witness to an altercation in which she took no part was highly displeasing, as being an unimportant secondary post—now, rallying her dignity, prepared to utter a discourse which was to prove both parties in the wrong, and to make it clear to each disputant that she had reason to be ashamed of herself, and ought to submit humbly to the superior sense of the individual then addressing her. Fortunately for her audience, she had not harangued above ten minutes, when Sarah's entrance with the tea-tray called her attention, first, to the fact of that damsel having a gilt comb in her hair and a red necklace round her throat, and secondly, and subsequently to a pointed remonstrance, to the duty of making tea. After the meal, Rose restored her to good-humour by bringing her guitar and asking for a song, and afterwards engaging her

in an intelligent and sharp cross-examination about guitar-playing and music in general.

Jessie, meantime, directed her assiduities to Caroline. Sitting on a stool at her feet, she talked to her, first about religion and then about politics. Jessie was accustomed at home to drink in a great deal of what her father said on these subjects, and afterwards in company to retail, with more wit and fluency than consistency or discretion, his opinions, antipathies, and preferences. She rated Caroline soundly for being a member of the Established Church, and for having an uncle a clergyman. She informed her that she lived on the country, and ought to work for her living honestly, instead of passing a useless life, and eating the bread of idleness in the shape of tithes. Thence Jessie passed to a review of the Ministry at that time in office, and a consideration of its deserts. She made familiar mention of the names of Lord Castlereagh and Mr. Percival. Each of these personages she adorned with a character that might have separately suited Moloch and Belial. She denounced the war as wholesale murder, and Lord Wellington as a "hired butcher."

Her auditors listened with exceeding edification. Jessie had something of the genius of humour in her nature: it was inexpressibly comic to hear her repeating her sire's denunciations in his nervous

northern Doric; as hearty a little Jacobin as ever pent a free mutinous spirit in a muslin frock and sash. Not malignant by nature, her language was not so bitter as it was racy, and the expressive little face gave a piquancy to every phrase which held a beholder's interest captive.

Caroline chid her when she abused Lord Wellington; but she listened delighted to a subsequent tirade against the Prince Regent. Jessie quickly read in the sparkle of her hearer's eye, and the laughter hovering round her lips, that at last she had hit on a topic that pleased. Many a time had she heard the fat 'Adonis of fifty' discussed at her father's breakfast-table, and she now gave Mr. Yorke's comments on the theme—genuine as uttered by his Yorkshire lips.

But, Jessie, I will write about you no more. This is an autumn evening, wet and wild. There is only one cloud in the sky; but it curtains it from pole to pole. The wind cannot rest: it hurries sobbing over hills of sullen outline, colourless with twilight and mist. Rain has beat all day on that church-tower: it rises dark from the stony enclosure of its graveyard: the nettles, the long grass, and the tombs all drip with wet. This evening reminds me too forcibly of another evening some years ago: a howling, rainy autumn evening too—when certain who had that day performed a pilgrimage to a grave new-made in

a heretic cemetery, sat near a wood-fire on the hearth of a foreign dwelling. They were merry and social, but they each knew that a gap, never to be filled, had been made in their circle. They knew they had lost something whose absence could never be quite atoned for so long as they lived; and they knew that heavy falling rain was soaking into the wet earth which covered their lost darling; and that the sad, sighing gale was mourning above her buried head. The fire warmed them; Life and Friendship yet blessed them; but Jessie lay cold, confined, solitary—only the sod screening her from the storm.

Mrs. Yorke folded up her knitting, cut short the music-lesson and the lecture on politics, and concluded her visit to the cottage, at an hour early enough to ensure her return to Briarmains before the blush of sunset should quite have faded in heaven, or the path up the fields have become thoroughly moist with evening dew.

The lady and her daughters being gone, Caroline felt that she also ought to resume her scarf, kiss her cousin's cheek, and trip away homeward. If she lingered much later, dusk would draw on, and Fanny would be put to the trouble of coming to fetch her: it was both baking and ironing day at the Rectory, she remembered—Fanny would be busy. Still, she

could not quit her seat at the little parlour-window. From no point of view could the West look so lovely as from that lattice with the garland of jessamine round it, whose white stars and green leaves seemed now but gray pencil outlines—graceful in form, but colourless in tint—against the gold incarnadined of a summer evening—against the fire-tinged blue of an August sky, at eight o'clock, P.M.

Caroline looked at the wicket-gate, beside which holly-oaks spired up tall; she looked at the close hedge of privet and laurel fencing in the garden; her eyes longed to see something more than the shrubs, before they turned from that limited prospect: they longed to see a human figure, of a certain mould and height, pass the hedge and enter the gate. A human figure she at last saw—nay, two: Frederick Murgatroyd went by, carrying a pail of water; Joe Scott followed, dangling on his forefinger the keys of the mill. They were going to lock up mill and stables for the night, and then betake themselves home.

“So must I,” thought Caroline, as she half rose and sighed.

“This is all folly—heart-breaking folly,” she added. “In the first place, though I should stay till dark, there will be no arrival; because I feel in my heart, Fate has written it down in to-day’s page of her eternal book, that I am not to have the pleasure

I long for. In the second place, if he stepped in this moment, my presence here would be a chagrin to him, and the consciousness that it must be so would turn half my blood to ice. His hand would, perhaps, be loose and chill, if I put mine into it: his eye would be clouded, if I sought its beam. I should look up for that kindling, something I have seen in past days, when my face, or my language, or my disposition had at some happy moment pleased him—I should discover only darkness. I had better go home.”

She took her bonnet from the table where it lay, and was just fastening the ribbon, when Hortense, directing her attention to a splendid bouquet of flowers in a glass on the same table, mentioned that Miss Keeldar had sent them that morning from Fieldhead; and went on to comment on the guests that lady was at present entertaining, on the bustling life she had lately been leading; adding divers conjectures that she did not very well like it, and much wonderment that a person who was so fond of her own way as the heiress, did not find some means of sooner getting rid of this cortège of relatives.

“But they say she actually will not let Mr. Sympson and his family go,” she added: “they wanted much to return to the south last week, to be ready for the reception of the only son, who is expected home from a tour. She insists that her

cousin Henry shall come and join his friends here in Yorkshire. I daresay she partly does it to oblige Robert and myself."

"How to oblige Robert and you?" inquired Caroline.

"Why, my child, you are dull. Don't you know—you must often have heard ——"

"Please, ma'am," said Sarah, opening the door, "the preserves that you told me to boil in treacle—the conffiters, as you call them—is all burnt to the pan."

"Les confitures! Elles sont brûlées? Ah, quelle négligence coupable! Coquine de cuisinière—fille insupportable!"

And Mademoiselle, hastily taking from a drawer a large linen apron, and tying it over her black apron, rushed "éperdue" into the kitchen, whence—to speak truth—exhaled an odour of calcined sweets rather strong than savoury.

The mistress and maid had been in full feud the whole day, on the subject of preserving certain black cherries, hard as marbles, sour as sloes. Sarah held that sugar was the only orthodox condiment to be used in that process; Mademoiselle maintained—and proved it by the practice and experience of her mother, grandmother, and great grandmother—that treacle, "mélasse," was infinitely preferable. She had committed an imprudence in leaving Sarah in

charge of the preserving-pan, for her want of sympathy in the nature of its contents had induced a degree of carelessness in watching their confection, whereof the result was—dark and cindery ruin. Hubbub followed: high upbraiding, and sobs rather loud than deep or real.

Caroline, once more turning to the little mirror, was shading her ringlets from her cheek to smooth them under her cottage bonnet, certain that it would not only be useless but unpleasant to stay longer; when, on the sudden opening of the back-door, there fell an abrupt calm in the kitchen: the tongues were checked, pulled up as with bit and bridle. “Was it—was it—Robert?” He often—almost always—entered by the kitchen-way on his return from market. No: it was only Joe Scott, who, having hemmed significantly thrice—every hem being meant as a lofty rebuke to the squabbling womankind—said,—

“Now, I thowt I heerd a crack?”

None answered.

“And,” he continued, pragmatically, “as t’ mairster’s comed, and as he’ll enter through this hoyle, I considered it desirable to step in and let ye know. A houseful o’ women is nivver fit to be comed on wi’out warning. Here he is: walk forrard, sir. They war playing up queerly, but I think I’ve quietened ’em.”

Another person—it was now audible—entered. Joe Scott proceeded with his rebukes.

“What d’ye mean by being all i’ darkness? Sarah, thou quean, canst t’ not light a candle? It war sundown an hour syne. He ’ll brak’ his shins agean some o’ yer pots, and tables, and stuff. Tak’ tent o’ this baking-bowl, sir; they ’ve set it i’ yer way, fair as if they did it i’ malice.”

To Joe’s observations succeeded a confused sort of pause, which Caroline, though she was listening with both her ears, could not understand. It was very brief: a cry broke it—a sound of surprise, followed by the sound of a kiss: ejaculations, but half articulate, succeeded.

“*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! Est-ce que je m’y attendais?*” were the words chiefly to be distinguished.

“*Et tu te portes toujours bien, bonne sœur?*” inquired another voice—Robert’s, certainly.

Caroline was puzzled. Obeying an impulse, the wisdom of which she had not time to question, she escaped from the little parlour, by way of leaving the coast clear, and running up-stairs took up a position at the head of the banisters, whence she could make further observations ere presenting herself. It was considerably past sunset now: dusk filled the passage, yet not such deep dusk but that she could presently see Robert and Hortense traverse it.

“Caroline! Caroline!” called Hortense, a moment afterwards, “venez voir mon frère!”

“Strange!” commented Miss Helstone, “passing strange! What does this unwonted excitement about such an everyday occurrence as a return from market portend? She has not lost her senses, has she? Surely the burnt treacle has not crazed her?”

She descended in a subdued flutter: yet more was she fluttered when Hortense seized her hand at the parlour-door, and leading her to Robert, who stood in bodily presence, tall and dark against the one window, presented her with a mixture of agitation and formality, as though they had been utter strangers, and this was their first mutual introduction.

Increasing puzzle! He bowed rather awkwardly, and turning from her with a stranger’s embarrassment, he met the doubtful light from the window: it fell on his face, and the enigma of the dream (a dream it seemed) was at its height: she saw a visage like and unlike,—Robert, and no Robert.

“What is the matter?” said Caroline. “Is my sight wrong? Is it my cousin?”

“Certainly, it is your cousin,” asserted Hortense.

Then who was this now coming through the passage,—now entering the room? Caroline, looking round, met a new Robert,—the real Robert, as she felt at once.

“Well said he, smiling at her questioning, astonished face, “which is which?”

“Ah! this is *you!*” was the answer.

He laughed. “I believe it is *me*: and do you know who *he* is? You never saw him before; but you have heard of him.”

She had gathered her senses now.

“It *can* be only one person: your brother, since it is so like you: my other cousin, Louis.”

“Clever little Œdipus!—you would have baffled the Sphynx!—but now, see us together. Change places. Change again, to confuse her, Louis.—Which is the old love now, Lina?”

“As if it were possible to make a mistake when you speak! You should have told Hortense to ask. But you are not so much alike: it is only your height, your figure, and complexion that are so similar.”

“And I am Robert, am I not?” asked the new comer, making a first effort to overcome what seemed his natural shyness.

Caroline shook her head gently. A soft, expressive ray from her eye beamed on the real Robert: it said much.

She was not permitted to quit her cousins soon: Robert himself was peremptory in obliging her to remain. Glad, simple, and affable in her demeanour (glad for this night, at least), in light, bright spirits

for the time, she was too pleasant an addition to the cottage circle to be willingly parted with by any of them. Louis seemed naturally rather a grave, still, retiring man, but the Caroline of this evening, which was not (as you know, reader) the Caroline of every day, thawed his reserve, and cheered his gravity soon. He sat near her, and talked to her. She already knew his vocation was that of tuition; she learned now he had for some years been the tutor of Mr. Sympson's son; that he had been travelling with him, and had accompanied him to the north. She inquired if he liked his post, but got a look in reply which did not invite or license further question. The look woke Caroline's ready sympathy: she thought it a very sad expression to pass over so sensible a face as Louis's: for he *had* a sensible face, —though not handsome, she considered, when seen near Robert's. She turned to make the comparison. Robert was leaning against the wall, a little behind her, turning over the leaves of a book of engravings, and probably listening, at the same time, to the dialogue between her and Louis.

“How could I think them alike?” she asked herself: “I see now it is Hortense, Louis resembles, not Robert.”

And this was in part true: he had the shorter nose and longer upper-lip of his sister, rather than the fine traits of his brother: he had her

mould of mouth and chin—all less decisive, accurate, and clear than those of the young mill-owner. His air, though deliberate and reflective, could scarcely be called prompt and acute. You felt, in sitting near and looking up at him, that a slower and probably a more benignant nature than that of the elder Moore shed calm on your impressions.

Robert—perhaps aware that Caroline's glance had wandered towards and dwelt upon him, though he had neither met nor answered it—put down the book of engravings, and approaching, took a seat at her side. She resumed her conversation with Louis, but, while she talked to him, her thoughts were elsewhere: her heart beat on the side from which her face was half-averted. She acknowledged a steady, manly, kindly air in Louis; but she bent before the secret power of Robert. To be so near him—though he was silent—though he did not touch so much as her scarf-fringe, or the white hem of her dress—affected her like a spell. Had she been obliged to speak to him *only*, it would have quelled—but, at liberty to address another, it excited her. Her discourse flowed freely: it was gay, playful, eloquent. The indulgent look and placid manner of her auditor encouraged her to ease; the sober pleasure expressed by his smile drew out all that was brilliant in her nature. She felt that this evening she appeared to advantage, and, as

Robert was a spectator, the consciousness contented her : had he been called away, collapse would at once have succeeded stimulus.

But her enjoyment was not long to shine full-orbed : a cloud soon crossed it.

Hortense, who for some time had been on the move ordering supper, and was now clearing the little table of some books, &c., to make room for the tray, called Robert's attention to the glass of flowers, the carmine and snow and gold of whose petals looked radiant indeed by candlelight.

"They came from Fieldhead," she said, "intended as a gift to you, no doubt: we know who is the favourite there—not I, I'm sure."

It was a wonder to hear Hortense jest ; a sign that her spirits were at high-water mark indeed.

"We are to understand, then, that Robert is the favourite?" observed Louis.

"Mon cher," replied Hortense, "Robert—c'est tout ce qu'il y a de plus précieux au monde : à côté de lui, le reste du genre humain n'est que du rebut. N'ai-je pas raison, mon enfant?" she added, appealing to Caroline.

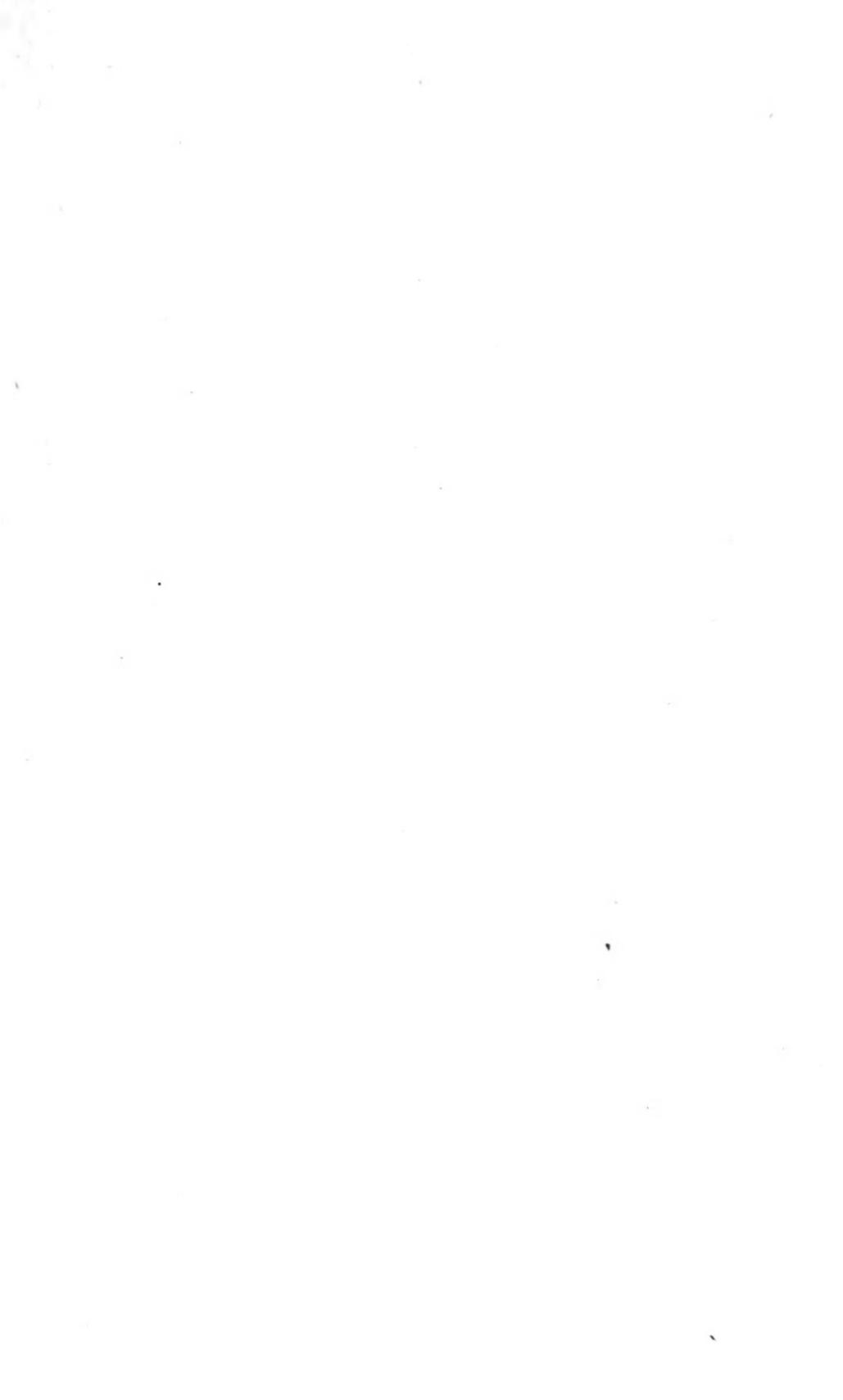
Caroline was obliged to reply, "Yes"—and her beacon was quenched : her star withdrew, as she spoke.

"Et toi, Robert?" inquired Louis.

"When you shall have an opportunity, ask herself,"

was the quiet answer. Whether he reddened or paled, Caroline did not examine : she discovered that it was late, and she must go home. Home she would go : not even Robert could detain her now.

END OF VOL. II.



S 52
1849
v. 2

